

# *Languageing!*

The Exploratory Learning and Teaching Newsletter of  
Dokkyo University • No. 10 • Winter 2007



## *Student Features*

|                                         |              |   |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Good Teachers, Bad Teachers             | Ami Ouchi    | 3 |
| The Elementary English Education Debate | Yuko Iwasaki | 5 |

## *Focus on Teaching*

|                                    |                 |    |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|----|
| Go Observe and Accept Observers!   | Risa Aoki       | 7  |
| Influencing Student Attitudes      | Robert Palka    | 10 |
| Scaffolding More Human Interaction | Chris Carpenter | 13 |
| Reading Minority Literature        | Tomoko Ichitani | 15 |

## *Community of Practice*

|                                       |               |    |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|----|
| JALT2007: "Going" vs. "Being Part of" | Naoki Yamaura | 20 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|----|

## *Critical Perspectives*

|                                   |                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----|
| A Plea for Democracy in Education | Akiko Kiuchi                      | 22 |
| Guess What? Students Do Care!     | Stephen Christie<br>with students | 25 |
| The Wisdom of Crowds and ELT      | Tim Murphey                       | 29 |

## *Research Pathways*

|                                         |                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|----|
| Confidence and Anxiety in Speaking      | Sarah Osboe, Tomoko<br>Fujimura, Rob Hirschel | 32 |
| The Kind of English Students Want       | Tetsuya Fukuda                                | 36 |
| Yoji Jukugo: Message in Four Characters | Jeroen Bode                                   | 39 |

## *Global Interaction*

|                                         |                        |    |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|----|
| Students as Researchers                 | Masayasu Sakaguchi     | 43 |
| Nepal: Education for All by 2015        | Koko Kato, Tim Murphey | 46 |
| Get Involved! How to Start Volunteering | Naoki Sekimoto         | 49 |

*Plus Reader's Forum, Website Recommendations, The Chatroom and more!*

## Welcome to Languaging! No. 10!

*The biggest issue EVER!*

Yes, this is it, *Languaging! No. 10*, and at 52 pages, the biggest issue ever! At five years running, we are happy to present to you yet another collection of writings and ideas from our own community of teachers, learners, and readers. Once again we have a nice assortment of topics from a wide range of writers, including students, undergrad and graduate, teachers, faculty and adjunct, from Dokkyo University as well as guests from other institutions as far away as Brazil. We welcome and thank them all for enriching our community with their words.

\* \* \*

We would like to thank our many guest editors, **Tetsuya Fukuda**, **Yuko Iwasaki**, **Takeshi Kikuchi** and **Jerry Waldman**, for all of their help. Also we were happy to again welcome contributions from our sister community at the University of Tsukuba. Our special Ibaraki editor, **Markus Rude**, once again solicited valuable additions to this issue from his colleagues. We are happy and proud to learn that Tsukuba will soon be starting their own access publication based on the *Languaging!* model, with the first issue to be launched in June 2008.

*Happy reading and have a splendid New Year!*  
The editors of Languaging! No. 10

Christopher Carpenter  
Stephen Christie  
Tim Murphey  
Markus Rude

\* \* \*

*This issue is dedicated to our coeditor, colleague and friend, the founder of this newsletter, **Tim Murphey**. He will be leaving our immediate community next year, but we know wherever he goes he will continue to inspire people, students and teachers alike, with his energy, ideas, and passion. Like the Christmas Butterfly on the cover (don't you know?), Tim*

*helps people find their wings, and, as he is fond of saying,*

**Become the Change  
We wish to see in the World!**

*Best of luck, Tim, and thanks for everything!*

\* \* \*

### Share your learning and teaching explorations!

*Languaging!* is a place to experiment, not just write about experiments. Think about your favorite ways of teaching and learning - fun ways to learn that could help others. Think about the data you might collect and share in our informal newsletter: keeping a journal, recording your changing feelings and ideas, having friends observe your classes, visiting friends' classes, getting feedback from students on your classes, your materials, or the whole education system! Read a good book? Write about it. Have a good idea? Write about it. Had a good conversation? Write about it!

*Get your ideas out in Languaging!*  
*Ask your students to submit their ideas, too!*  
Send submissions for *Languaging! No. 11*  
by May 15<sup>th</sup> to the editors at  
[languaging@yahoo.com](mailto:languaging@yahoo.com)

\* \* \*

**Ye Olde Standard Disclaimer:** The opinions and views expressed in *Languaging!* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors nor of Dokkyo University (and maybe not even of the authors - after all people change their minds all the time!). Nevertheless, we hope you enjoy!

\* \* \*

### "See Also" Contents:

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Readers Forum               | 24 |
| Website Recommendations     | 31 |
| Brown Bag Tuesdays          | 38 |
| Photocopiable Activity Page | 51 |
| The Efficiency Column       | 52 |

## ***Good Teachers, Bad Teachers and How to Tell the Difference***

Ami Ouchi • Dokkyo University

We have met many teachers in our lives. Like the proverb, it might be said, "So many teachers, so many minds." Whether the teachers you have met were good or not, they played an important part in your life. If you meet good teachers, you will be interested in subjects they teach. While, if you meet bad ones, you will not like their subjects.

It is difficult to divide teachers into good and bad generally, because while some people might regard Mr. Z as good, others might not. That is a matter of taste or caused by chemistry rather than the quality of the teachers. Now, I am going to introduce the best teacher and the worst teacher I have ever met. First of all, I will tell a story about a good teacher.

I have met many good teachers, one of whom, Mr. X, an English teacher, was the most wonderful teacher in my life. I liked him because of his character. He was so cheerful that he made his students happy all the time in class. Besides that, he was so passionate that he always tried to interest the students in his class. He not only talked about English but also topics related to the subject. During

classes, he was always smiling, talking loudly and looking at students' eyes.

He memorized his students' names very quickly. By the second lesson, he could call the name of all the students. That did not seem important so much, but I was impressed by his behavior.

**"He was so cheerful that he made his students happy all the time in class. Besides that, he was so passionate that he always tried to interest the students in his class."**

Talking about materials, he used not only the textbook, but also handouts he had made, pictures, DVDs, and CDs, etc. Using various materials made the class colorful. Therefore, the students were not bored.

The most important thing was that he respected students'

opinions. When students could not answer correctly, he never said "You are wrong", instead "It is a good idea, but...", "Great! But you can think more deeply", "Thank you for giving me a new idea". He always praised the students. He did not talk all the time, in order that he could give students opportunities to speak in class. Therefore, students could say their opinion without hesitation and his class was very energetic and full of cheer.

Next, I will tell a story about a bad teacher. Mr. Y, a history teacher, was the worst teacher in my life. I have three reasons why I feel in this way.

First, he was always late for his class, but he never apologized. In fact, as soon as he came in the class, he started to drink coffee and made himself relaxed. Moreover, he did not try to remember his students' names. He called us all "you" ("You, sitting near the window") or pointed without saying anything.

Second, he was just entirely talking during the class. His voice was flat, low and rapid so that the students were bored and felt sleepy. Talking about materials, he sometimes used DVDs, which also made us bored, because we were only watching the DVDs all the time, while, he did other things which had nothing to do with the class, for example, correcting the students' tests, reading novels, or being relaxed.

Finally, in the class, if students' answers were not right, he said only "You are wrong," or said right answers quickly. He never praised or gave students who could not answer correctly more hints or chances to answer again. Therefore, it became harder for the students to say their

opinions in class because of hesitation. His class was not active, fun and aggressive.

Generally speaking, bad teachers tend to be egotistic and lacking consideration. They cannot teach but for money.

In my opinion, students' likes and dislikes of subjects depend on teachers. Therefore, teachers play a very important role in our lives. Now, I am taking a course to become a professional English teacher. The course offers ideas about how to teach so that many students begin to like English and school. In conclusion, I have to thank my bad teachers, because they have shown me a model of the kind I teacher I don't want to become.

### About the writer

Ami Ouchi is a third year student in the English Department, presently doing volunteer teaching in a local elementary school and studying second language acquisition in Okada-sensei's seminar. She will be doing teaching practice next year in a junior high school.

### BABY BLUES

by Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



## English Education in Elementary Schools

~A Debatable Topic~

Yuko Iwasaki, Dokkyo University

In 2006, the Ministry of Education (Monkasho) decided to begin English education in public elementary schools in Japan. Why have they decided to do this? I think this is because we begin studying grammar first when we become junior high students and this fact makes some of us dislike English. So the Monkasho thought getting used to English before junior high, and then studying grammar would be better. Also, although most Japanese students study English for at least 6 years plus university study, still many cannot communicate in English. Monkasho's idea is to help more Japanese students learn how to communicate in English.

There are many arguments for and against having education in elementary schools. In this essay I will tell you about some of the arguments on both sides, then I will explain why I believe we should not have mandatory English education in elementary school.

First let's look at the main arguments for English education in elementary schools. Of course, it's easier to acquire other languages when children are younger. Many parents couldn't talk or improve their English

skills even after they studied for about six years, so they don't want their children to have the same experiences. I began studying English in junior high school. During my junior and senior high school days, my favorite subject was English and I

**“I agree that I might have learned more English if I had started earlier, but also think that if I had more chances to practice during junior and senior high school, I would have been better at communicating in English.”**

always got good scores and often the best grades. But because I mainly studied grammar and didn't have much chance to talk in English, I couldn't communicate with foreigners at first when I entered university. I was also shocked about this. I agree that I might have learned more English if I had started earlier, but also think that if I had more chances to practice during junior and senior high school, I would have been better at

communicating in English. I don't believe it's necessary to start younger.

Now let's look at the main arguments against English education in elementary schools. In private elementary schools, they've already had English education for years, but the situation is very different from that in public ones, for instance, how much time and money they can spend on education. The number of public

elementary schools where English education has begun is increasing. But there are already some problems. First, teachers have little or no time to prepare for English classes because they have to teach all subjects (Japanese, math, social studies, science, PE etc.). Second, according to research from Benesse Corporation, there are only 4% of elementary school teachers who have an English teaching license. The other 96% of teachers don't have it, and that means they haven't studied how to teach English for students. If teachers must teach English, they should be trained to teach it, but because they are busy with other work, they won't have time to be trained. However, Monkasho is not hiring more teachers and teachers are only becoming busier. As for Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), some are hired only because their mother tongue is English. It means that those ALTs have little or no knowledge of teaching students. This is a big problem, and they also need training.

I disagree that children should start studying English in elementary schools. Even if children learn English, what if they don't know about Japan? Can they communicate with others without knowing about themselves first? Also, students learn English for international communication. But maybe, kids should learn to communicate in Japanese first. For example, many young children have difficulty communicating directly in Japanese. Even using greetings can be difficult for some kids. English should be a new way to communicate, not the only way to communicate. I think English is one of the ways to study international communication, but first we need to

communicate with each other.

If English is mandatory, I think we should change the curriculum to have classes on Saturday again or have a few more classes for teaching English in a week. But then we need to hire more teachers. What do you think of this topic? Should children start learning English from elementary school or junior high? In fact, I work as a volunteer English teacher at public elementary school in Soka now. I will tell you my experiences in the next issue.

### About the writer

Yuko Iwasaki is a teacher-in-training and 3rd year student in the English Department at Dokkyo University.

### Works referenced for this article:

築道和明(1997)。「小学生の英語指導:何をめざして何から始めるか」明治図書。

Tsuido, K. (1997). *English education for elementary school students: What is the goal? What should we start first?* Meiji Toshoh.

大津由紀雄(2006)。「日本の英語教育に必要なこと:小学校英語と英語教育政策」慶応義塾大学出版会。

Otsu, Y. (2006). *Necessary things for English education in Japan: Elementary school English & English education policy*, Keio Gijuku University.

『どう考える「小学校英語」!? 賛成派・反対派の意見』Benesse 教育研究開発センター。

"What do you think of 'English Education in Elementary School'? Agree or Disagree?"

Benesse: Education Information Center.

Accessed on Aug. 24th, 2007, at

<http://benesse.jp/blog/20061115/p1.html>

「小学校英語は中学以降の英語に役立つの!?」Benesse 教育研究開発センター。

"Is it effective for children to study English before going to junior high school?" Benesse:

Education Information Center. Accessed on

Aug. 24th, 2007, at

<http://benesse.jp/blog/20061122/p1.html>

## ***Go Observe and Accept Observers!***

### ***See Through Someone Else's Eyes and See What You've Been Missing***

Risa Aoki, Tokai University

This is a story how a first year teacher found a way to improve their teaching after observing an experienced teacher. The first year teacher is me - I teach at Tokai University. Every day, I reflect on what I taught after class. I sometimes feel very positive about what I did and other times, I feel regret and blame myself. I believe most teachers share this feeling especially when they are first starting out.

Before I began my teaching career in Japan, I was determined to realize my teaching belief: I would like to have more pair and group activities to create more interaction and oral practice among students. Through my learning and teaching experience in the U.S., I found huge differences between English education in the U.S. and Japan. Generally these differences are as follows:

| <b><i>English education in Japan</i></b>          | <b><i>English education in the U.S.</i></b>         |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Teacher-centered</i>                           | <i>Student-centered</i>                             |
| <i>More lecture and explanation from teachers</i> | <i>More pair work and group work among students</i> |

Because I saw students improve their speaking abilities through pair and group work in the U.S., I came to believe that I should adopt more group work to transform English education in Japan into a more communicative

experience.

However, after starting teaching in Japan, I sometimes did not feel comfortable when I tried to have group activities in my class. My internal voice says, "Is it difficult for Japanese students to do group activities because they did not do that in their previous education?" "If they cannot do group activities well, are they embarrassed and do I create a negative atmosphere in the classroom?" In short, I was scared of students' reactions to group activities.

That is one of the reasons I decided to visit Tim Murphey's class. I wanted to reassure myself if it is still effective to apply more group activities in the particular setting of Japan. I also wanted to learn how to successfully lead group work in Japan. I went to Dokkyo University to observe his speaking class on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007. On that day, Murphey had students talk in pairs about "three people you admire." As homework, the students had already written three stories about three people. In addition, he videotaped every student, two students' conversing for five minutes at a time in front of the camera, while the other students spoke with other partners, changing pairs every five minutes.

The first thing Murphey asked me to do was to participate as a student. Thanks to playing a student's role and experiencing a student's point of view, I was able to understand much better about the students and about the pair activities. I was able to clearly see what students were actually doing during the pair activities. In addition, so many things that happened during the activities helped me to improve my own English.

First of all, I monitored and modified my own speech and was able to improve my speaking performance after repeated interaction with other students. In total, I talked with three students in pairs. Each time when I changed partners, I realized I spoke better than in the previous conversation. For example, because the partner showed by her puzzled facial expression that she did not understand a certain part of my story, I noticed I needed to correct that part the next time and I did so with the next partner. The more partners I practiced with, the better I summarized what I really wanted to say. I "progressed" in speaking through the negotiation of meaning with other people having real conversations.

Moreover, I learned a lot from "near-peer role models." Some students seemed pleased to take the risk of making mistakes and spoke English very positively. Usually, Japanese students feel shy about

speaking and are scared to make mistakes, so I was very impressed. That energy affected me. In this ideal classroom atmosphere, I enjoyed the process of improving my speaking. I learned a positive attitude while learning English from my peer-models.

But here, I would also like to emphasize that the comfortable classroom atmosphere was first created by the teacher. During the

**"Because of the lack of experience of group work from both the teacher's and students' sides, I worried that group activities might not work well."**

activity, he sometimes shouted and had students repeat the expression, "Relax! Be happy!" He also asked students, "What time is it now?" and had them answer, "It's time to be happy!" Everyone smiled and laughed at those moments and I felt my affective filter was lowered thanks to these humorous expressions. The positive message in the expressions helped students to feel comfortable to try out English with other students.

As I mentioned above, his class showed me that it is effective for Japanese students to practice speaking English in group activities. Then I thought about where my fear came from. Before, I thought it might come from my lack of confidence when it came to my teaching. But now I came up with a better word to explain my fear - it came from "lack of experience." Speaking from a teacher's point of view, I am new at this, so I do not have a lot of teaching experience yet. In addition, my students felt that group work was



different from lectures they had had in their previous classes. Because of the lack of experience of group work from both the teacher's and students' sides, I worried that group activities might not work well.

Another reason why group work seemed difficult is that a teacher cannot expect or plan exactly what is going to happen in the classroom in advance. Depending on students' reactions in the classroom, teachers have to think on their feet, be flexible, help students, and solve their problems. In this sense, a lecture is easier than group work. In a lecture, teachers can plan what they are going to teach in advance and simply explain to students what they had worked on in the class. However, after observing Dr. Murphey's class, I think that it is far more important to give students opportunities to speak English through group work than for me to feel comfortable with my own expectations. Sometimes, I might not help students in an appropriate way during group work, but I should not give up before I try.

Back at Tokai University, I applied what I learned from Murphey's class in my class. The biggest change is that I feel confident to conduct group work. It is because I am sure students can get the most benefits from group work. In addition, since I saw successful "model" students in Murphey's "model" class, I came to believe I can lead my students to that advanced level. Now, I am trying to send a message to my students such as "I believe you can

speak and improve your English." Even though the message is unsaid, students realize what a teacher is thinking. In this way, students and I are "relaxed and happy" enough to do group activities and improve our respective performances, my teaching and their English abilities.

In conclusion, after the observation, I found a way to conduct group work better. However, I think I could not have learned as much if I had not played a student's role and seen what was actually going on during the group activity. A student's eyes are the opposite from a teacher's. Through a student's eyes, I was also able to subjectively reflect on the classes I taught. Then I was able to modify my class. On the other side of the coin, Murphey mentioned that he thought a good deal more about his class with an observer present. He told me that he reflected on what and how he was teaching during the observation. Therefore, I think observation is very advantageous for both the observer and the teacher who is observed. I highly recommend that teachers go observe others and also accept observers!

### **About the writer**

Risa Aoki is a recent graduate of San Francisco State University's MA in TESOL program and has been teaching at Tokai University, Kanda Institute of Foreign Languages, and Tsudajukukai. Also, she has been working at Tokyo Labor Consultation Center as an interpreter since April of this year.

# ***Influencing Student's Attitudes by Changing Our Own***

Robert Palka, Dokkyo University

On any given day in any teacher's room, the following can often be heard, "Aw man, now I must teach THAT class again. Those students just don't have any motivation. They're unresponsive. They're always tired and sleeping. Just no energy ...grumble, grumble..." And away walks the unmotivated teacher to his (or her) unmotivated class.

I'm sure even the chirpiest teachers have experienced the above scenario, but it begs the question - is the teacher de-motivating the students with his attitude upon walking into the class, or are the students de-motivating the teacher with theirs? (Or is it the last period on a mid-summer Friday evening, which can be a separate issue all together?) Sounds like the old hen or egg argument. Either way, somebody is influencing and practically imposing their emotions on somebody else.

This influencing and converging of emotions is referred to as "Emotional Contagion". Emotional contagion is often described as a theory predicting that people automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations,

postures, and movements with others and consequently converge emotionally as a result of the activation and/or feedback from such mimicry (Hatfield, et al., 1992). A broader definition is given as "a process in which a person or

group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes" (Barsade, 2002), which is just another way of saying that if I'm happy and smile at you; you will smile back at me and suddenly feel happy (or at least happier than immediately before) for no apparent reason.

Although emotional contagion usually occurs implicitly, there is a light at

the end of the teacher's woes.

Knowing that we are able to influence the emotions of our students, we can consciously attempt to influence it for the better (Mottet, et al. 2000). We can transfer our positive emotions onto our students (Salmansohn, 2007). The energy level with which we display our positive emotions affects the level of the contagion. So the more positive and energetic we appear, relatively

**“... straighten  
your back, stick  
your chest out,  
bring your  
shoulders back,  
lift up your  
head, SMILE  
and just try to  
feel really sad. It  
is actually  
difficult to be  
genuinely 'sad'  
in this physical  
state.”**

speaking, the more positive the students should become. However, it must be kept in mind that the display of this positive attitude must appear real. If it is only surface acting, the students can pick up on that and the contagion will be poor or even non-existent.

Now that we have established that we are indeed able to emotionally influence and motivate our students into a more positive state, the next question is how (Hsee, et al. 1990). The simple answer is that we ourselves need to be in a positive state before even entering the classroom (better yet, before exiting the teacher's room. You never know which students are lurking about). Even though we might not be feeling positive, we still need for the students to perceive that we are indeed feeling positive and energetic. So we need to quickly change our state of mind accordingly. Changing ones state of mind can be done both physiologically and psychologically. Our focus will be on the physiological.

Focusing on the physiological, it has been well established that our emotional and mental states affect our physical state. We can often easily tell if somebody is angry, sad, happy or excited by looking at his or her body language and face. Picture a person in a negative mental state. They will usually have a slouched back, drooped shoulders, shallow breathing, and head down with a lowered gaze and a frown, right? It is difficult to feel positive emotions in this physical state because our brains associate this physical state

with feeling negative. (To the reader: after making sure nobody is looking at you, assume a "negative" physical posture, and try to feel really happy.) Now picture a person in a positive mental state. Their head will often be held up high, eyes looking straight or up, chest out, back straight, shoulders back and corners of the lips up, right? Our brains associate these symptoms with feeling positive (Robbins, 1997). (To the reader: after being in a "negative" position and making sure again that nobody is looking at you funny, straighten your back, stick your chest out, bring your shoulders back, lift up your head, SMILE and try to feel really sad. It is actually difficult to be genuinely 'sad' in this physical state.)

As mentioned before, it is well established that our emotional and mental state influences our physical state. What is not so well known however is that we can go the other way around too, and we can use our physical state to influence our emotional and mental state. We can actually consciously change the way we feel by changing our posture (Robbins, 1997). So in order to suddenly feel more positive using physiology, the best way to start is to simply start changing our body in a way that matches a positive instead of negative emotion, as described above.

In conclusion, using the above positive physical state will create a more positive mental and emotional state. This positive mental and emotional state will be "caught" by the students, which in turn will make them

more positive too, giving at least the beginning of the lesson a more positive start. Or more simply put: If you smile, you feel happy; if you frown, you feel sad. If you smile at them, they will smile back. If you frown at them, they will frown back.

### About the writer

Lawyer turned teacher, Robert Palka, came from South Africa to Japan in 2002. He teaches part-time at Dokkyo's Economics Department on Thursdays.

### Works cited in this article

- Barsade, S.G. (2002). The Ripple Effect: Emotional Contagion and Its Influence on Group Behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47, 644-675
- Hatfield, E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Rapson, R. L. (1994) *Emotional contagion*. New York:

Cambridge University Press.

Hsee, C.K., Hatfield, E., Carlson, J.G., & Chemtob, C. (1990) The Effect of Power on Susceptibility to Emotional Contagion. *Cognition and Emotion*, 4 (4), 327 - 240, Lawrence Erlbaum.

Mottet, T.P. & Beebe, S.A. (2000, November 9) *Emotional Contagion in the Classroom: An Examination of How Teacher and Student Emotions Are Related*. Paper presented at the 86th Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association, Seattle, WA.

Robbins, A. (1997). *Personal Power II*, Nightingale Conant.

Salmansohn, K. (2007). The Contagion Theory On Happiness. On the *Love, Happiness, Career & Money Empowering Blog!* At <http://www.notsalmon.com/2007/10/contagion-theory-on-happiness.html>, site accessed on Oct. 30, 2007.

## The Chatroom!

### **Quit studying English and start USING it!!!**

Every evening at the Chatroom you will ...

- discuss the themes and topics that **you want** to talk about
- build your **confidence** in English conversation through successful practice
- meet teachers who will **encourage and inspire** you
- meet other students who are also **interested in using English**
- **make friends** who can show you how to make English a part of your life

Every evening, **Monday through Friday**, the Research Institute for Foreign Language Teaching sponsors **free**, small group **conversation sessions in English** moderated by native speakers from all around the world. **French, German, Spanish, and Chinese** are also offered on regular schedules. All sessions are 45-minutes long, **starting at 4:45 and 5:30**. They are open to all Dokkyo students on a voluntary, first-come, first-serve basis, until they fill up.

Interested students should go to the International Communication Zone (ICZ) on the **2nd floor of Amano Hall** for more information and to sign up for today's Chatroom!!!

# ***Keeping It Real***

## ***Scaffolding More Human Interactions in the Language Classroom***

Christopher Carpenter, Dokkyo University

A teacher: *OK! Time's up! Move to the next partner! Alright, let's go! Don't you know who your partner is? Come on now, what are you waiting for? Christmas?*

The defining features of Communicative Language Teaching may be its emphasis on interaction and authentic language use. As teachers, we are constantly asking our students to engage in interactive tasks in pairs and small groups. Through experience and training, we have come to recognize such interaction as the cornerstone of developing communicative competence. Moreover, our students have too. Even students steeped in decontextualized drilling, grammar-translation analysis, and test after test after test after test in staid and stultifying authoritarian classes, even these students quickly comprehend the value of actually using the language. And they usually adapt to more student-centered, interactive environments without much difficulty.

Still, all teachers, perhaps especially teachers in Japan, have experienced the hesitation of

students to engage in a task, delayed reactions when trying to close a task, apparent confusion during transitions, and that slow-motion, lamb-to-the-slaughter look of some students as they approach a new partner. Teachers variously ascribe such behavior to students being unaccustomed to or unsuited for communicative language classrooms, or, more critically, to the teacher's own failure to clearly define or demonstrate a task.

While there may be multiple factors at play that inhibit students from engaging fully in a communicative language class, I challenge all teachers who are familiar with such frustrations to try the following. The next time you are initiating, closing, or signaling a transition between tasks, say pair work with rotating partners, instead of yelling out commands, try reminding your students to be human:

Teacher: *OK! Please say 'thank you' to your partner. (pause)*

Students: *Thank you. / Yeah, thank you. / Nice talking to you. / You too ...*

Teacher: *OK, now, please stand up and go to your next partner and say, 'Good morning! How are you today? I'm sorry, I forgot your name...'*

I have found in my own classes that by modifying my teacher-talk to a discourse emphasizing the human element of interaction, students become more responsive, relaxed and natural in their exchanges with each other. That is, by scaffolding interactive routines that support the building and maintenance of human relationships, students seem drawn naturally into interactive tasks instead of awkwardly or with trepidation.

In a language classroom, this may serve a double function. On the one hand, through lowering affective filters and providing pathways to more natural language use, it supports language acquisition, particularly of key language for basic conversation strategies. Moreover, the authenticity of almost any interactive task is increased when learners begin with a recognition that they and their partners are real people with real feelings and real ideas. Tasks done in a classroom are more transferrable to other contexts and thus more likely acquired when they are perceived as more authentic.

In addition to supporting these commonly recognized factors of second language acquisition, emphasizing the interpersonal dynamics of communication can also play a key role in terms of student investment and motivation. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of interpersonal relations to student motivation (Falout, 2007). By raising the quality of interpersonal interactions in the classroom, we may also be raising the value of social capital generated in these interactions, giving individual

learners more reason to invest in the community of practice represented by their classmates and the imagined community of speakers of the target language (Norton, 2001). These investments and recalibrations of identity are the flipside of the coin of motivation.

Finally, this approach to managing classroom tasks can also have a positive wash-back effect on the teacher himself, serving to remind the teacher of the students' humanity. Despite our best intentions, busy teachers with busy lesson plans and grand course goals can sometimes forget this ... at least, I know I have. But through a few adjustments to the way we guide our students' participation in activities, we can help ourselves remember the most important element of communication, the human element. With this realization, students are no longer sheep or even input/output language processors, but people. And that's what education should be about.

#### About the writer

Christopher teaches English to some of the most polite and conscientious non-English majors at Dokkyo University. Mom would be proud.

#### Works cited in this article

- Falout, J. (2007, November 13). De-motivation and re-motivation of students and teachers. Presentation at the *Brown Bag Tuesdays Presentation Series* at Dokkyo University, Saitama, Japan.
- Norton, B. (2001) Non-participation, imagined communities, and the language classroom. In M. Breen, (ed.) *Learner contributions to language learning: New directions in research*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 159 - 171.

## ***Reading Minority Literature: A Response to "Treading Lightly"***

Tomoko Ichitani, University of Tsukuba

In the last issue of *Languageing!*, in his article "Treading Lightly," Scott Stillar (2007) significantly points out the "lack of critical discourse regarding issues in Japanese society" and explores the way in which EFL education can effectively arouse "meaningful critical discourse" (p. 20). While the importance of the English language in order to promote a sense of global citizenship has been extensively discussed, considering the most valuable approach to it tends to be neglected in Japanese EFL.

Through my own intercultural experience of living and studying in England, I became aware that global citizenship can never be realized without facing up to home issues. During the stay in England, I had many opportunities to discuss issues about international relationships as I encountered various people from different culture and backgrounds. While I have learnt about social or political issues in other countries, I also re-learnt critical issues related to my own country and its history through others' perspectives. Particularly, through discussions with other Asian people such as the Chinese, Korean and Taiwanese, I realized the profound gulf of historical awareness toward

the Second World War and was shocked by the trans-generational trauma that they still suffer from through Japanese imperialism. Based on this experience, I have come to believe that the practice of international understanding will not be

**"The study of English has always been a strongly political and cultural phenomenon."**

possible until each of us engages in a critical discourse surrounding our own society and tackles the issue by understanding our subjectivity as fissured and politicized.

In this article I would like to examine the

possibility of promoting the awareness of critical issues in Japan by utilizing minority literature in English. As a person who specialized in postcolonial literature in English, I feel responsible for unpacking the ideological discourse that has been produced through the relation between English literary study and imperialism. The study of English has always been a strongly political and cultural phenomenon; some postcolonial critics argue that the study of English and the expansion of the British Empire proceeded from the same ideological climate and the growth of the one is intrinsically bound up with the growth of the other (Ashcroft et al., 1989). By being attentive to the minority's voice excluded from the discourse of the

mainstream, I believe that we can learn an alternative truth and deconstruct our internalized conceptions. While Stillar (2007) mentions possible critiques toward the "usage of diversion by first directing attention to issues outside of the students own culture", I will support the method and suggest the possibility of evoking a critical discourse at home through critical issues in other cultures by introducing the example of Australian indigenous theatrical productions that were shown in Japan .

### **Australian Indigenous Writing as Minority Literature**

The term 'indigenous Australian' refers to both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups, embracing many different communities with different languages and various cultural beliefs, practices and traditions. Whereas they were the traditional owners and custodians of Australia for over 50,000 years, they have been excluded from citizenship and were instead controlled by State government wards since the British colonization of Australia in 1788. In the 1960s indigenous people began to organize activist movements for their land-rights and suffrage, and the 1967 referendum eventually acknowledged their citizenship. In this context indigenous writing in English played a significant role. Through writing with the oppressor's language, indigenous authors not only express the indigenous predicament for better understanding, but also resist colonial control and construct their indigenous

identity.

*The Seven Stages of Grieving* by Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman (2001) and *Stolen* by Jane Harrison (2002) are the representative indigenous play writings of the 1990s and can help non-indigenous Australians become aware of indigenous issues in order to reconsider the nation's past and historical relationship between the nation's non-indigenous or settler people and its indigenous people. For example, in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (Enoch and Mailman, 2001) the poem, "Wreck/con/silly/nation," encapsulates indigenous people's challenges:

Boats ready for departure.  
If you don't want stay.  
A Wreck on arrival  
A changing flag  
A Con  
A Silly pride for sale,  
My Nation knows my identity,  
A sun,  
A land,  
A people, travelling.  
(p. 295)

While projecting a handwritten script on the stage screen, "Wreck", "Con", "Silly", "Nation", a woman character chants the poem and addresses the audience: "Wreck, Con, Silly, Nation. Some people I talk to would write it like this. What does it mean when some people can't even read or write the word? It can't be written down, it's something that you do." Those words are replaced by the projected word "RECONCILIATION" in large typed capital letters. Since the end of the 1980s, the redemptive



vision of 'reconciliation' has spread over Australia with the aim of bringing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together to share the land and culture in mutual understanding. However, unresolved problems including land and human rights issues remain and many Aboriginal people are skeptical of 'reconciliation', despite it being a powerful concept in contemporary Australia. In this context Enoch and Mailman acutely criticize the current Australian situation, reconstructing and recreating the English term 'reconciliation' into words with negative meanings such as 'wreck', 'con' and 'silly'. The word 'reconciliation' has no significance if it is not practiced.

**"These plays open up the possibility to explore the truth of history in a cross-cultural context."**

In the end of *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, the projected word moves into the woman's suitcase. However, she does not take the suitcase with her, instead places it at the feet of the audience before leaving the stage. In this suitcase the word "RECONCILIATION" is packed. What does this scene mean? I think that she invites the audience to engage with the task of communicating the traumatic history of indigenous people in order to realize true reconciliation.

### **Japanese Performances of *The Seven Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen***

In 2002 *The Seven Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen* were invited to the Tokyo International Arts Festival, translated into Japanese and performed by the Japanese theater

company Rakutendan. As the original Aboriginal performance of *Stolen*, produced by Melbourne's Playbox Theater Company and directed by Wesley Enoch, was also put on stage, the Japanese audience had an opportunity to see both companies' productions in this cross-cultural project. It was the first opportunity in the world for non-Aboriginal actors to perform the Aboriginal characters in

*The Seven Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen*, even though both plays have been performed by Australian indigenous theater companies in many different countries. However, there were many questions and criticisms directed at this project, specifically in terms of body politics and the

authenticity of Aboriginal identity. The indigenous director Wesley Enoch emphasizes that the ownership of culture is a crucial matter for indigenous Australians who have been represented by the settler culture and deprived of their land, language and custom since the colonization of Australia (Sawada, 2003). In indigenous plays such as *The Seven Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen*, which contain political issues and represent the trauma of indigenous history, "who is speaking for whom" is the most significant matter. While Japanese performances of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen* possessed the danger of the deprivation of indigenous culture, they also brought positive responses. In spite of the lack of a "politics of truth," Enoch

interestingly discovers new aspects of his own work through seeing Japanese performances. Because of the political vacuum in Japanese performances, Enoch realized that his works conveyed not only political messages about indigenous history but also universal messages beyond the Australian historical and political contexts. Enoch shows an affirmative attitude towards the fact that other directors can find something important to tell the Japanese audience in *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen*.

Jane Harrison, the author of *Stolen*, supports Japanese performances of her work and suggests that there is the possibility for us to learn from each other by pointing out that there is a parallel between the indigenous Australian's experience and that of the Ainu (Sawada, 2004). Double performances of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen* in Japan by Australian indigenous theater companies and Japanese theater companies offered a chance for the Japanese audience to encounter Australian indigenous issues and listen to their history of trauma. Moreover, as Yoshio Wada points out, the Japanese performances of Aboriginal plays are a significant project for opening up a new direction on indigenous issues in Japan, while it is still taboo to deal with not only Ainu but also the oppressed minority as a subject in Japanese theater. In directing *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, Wada chose two actresses for an indigenous woman's part: one is

Japanese and another is Korean (Sawada, 2003). This is an attempt to make both gender and racial issues visible by overlapping the woman character not only with Japanese women who have been oppressed by patriarchy, but also with Korean women who were subjugated and sexually exploited as "the sexual slaves" of the Japanese imperial army during the Second World War. Thus the Japanese performances of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen* have brought a clue to consider critical issues in Japanese society. These plays open up the possibility to explore the truth of history in a cross-cultural context.

### **Creating a Process of "Languageing": Introducing Minority Literature to EFL Classes**

In my EFL classes I have used the written scripts of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* and *Stolen* and asked the students to discuss what they thought through reading these plays after giving background information about indigenous issues in Australia and the productions by Japanese theater companies. At the beginning, they seemed to be confused by this field which is unfamiliar to them, however, they could engage themselves in this critical issue as they read and understood what indigenous authors represent in their texts. While interpreting the Aboriginal predicament, their resistance and assertion for enduring their indigenous identity, the students could expand the issue in other culture and came to

express their thoughts about critical issues in Japan such as Ainu people, Okinawa, as well as the Japanese responsibility toward Asian countries that were colonized by the Japanese empire. In the previous issue of *Languaging!* Tim Murphey and Chris Carpenter suggested the critical usage of language to "improve our use of it and ourselves" by employing Vygotskian sociocultural theory and connecting it with Merrill Swain's concept of "languaging" (Murphey and Carpenter, 2007). This argument reminds me of words by an indigenous writer, Alexis Wright (1997):

I have to remember the power of words. Our words are weapons too. Our books are time bombs and already are breaking down many barriers on their way across the world ... All we have to do is wait for a delayed reaction. We only have to wait and one day we will see change. This is the hope of writing. Believing the unbelievable  
(p. 20).

As an active expression of a minority experience, Australian Indigenous writing (language) has possessed and will continue to possess the power to change the world by attaining national and international readerships. Here, I find significance in minority literature which creates an awareness of national or international critical discourses. For us, reading minority literature is a dynamic process of "languaging" to deconstruct and reconstruct ourselves

and promote a sense of global citizenship.

### About the writer

Tomoko Ichitani is currently a research associate in University of Tsukuba. Her primary research area is postcolonial literatures and cultures and she is recently working on the field of the Atomic bomb literature.

### Works cited in this article

- Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin (1989). *The Empire Write Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literature*. London: Routledge.
- Enoch, W. and D. Mailman (2001). *The Seven Stages of Grieving*. In R. Vandenbroucke (Ed.), *Contemporary Australian Plays* (pp.270-298). London: Methuen.
- Harrison, J. (2002). *Stolen*. Strawberry Hills: Currency Press.
- Murphey, T. & C. Carpenter. (2007). 'Collaborative Writing and Languaging', *Languaging!*, 9, pp.34-35.
- Sawada, K. (2004). 'Japanese Performance of Aboriginal Dramas' (Aborigine engekino nihon jyoen), *Bulletin of Center of Theater Studies II (Engeki Kenkyu Senta Kyo, Waseda Daigaku 21seiki COE Puroguramu)*, pp. 7-16.
- Sawada, K. (2003). 'Contemporary Dramas in Translation' (Gendaino honyaku geki), *Bulletin of Center of Theater Studies I (Engeki Kenkyu Senta Kyo, Waseda Daigaku 21seiki COE Puroguramu)*, pp. 65-72.
- Stillar, S. (2007). 'Treading Lightly: Building critical rapport in order to promote healthy discussion of critical issues in Japanese EFL', *Languaging!*, 9, pp.20-22.
- Wright, A. (1997). *Plains of Promise*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

## ***JALT2007: From “Going to Attractions” to “Being Part of the Action”***

Naoki Yamaura, Dokkyo University

From November 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>, JALT2007, an international academic conference, was held in Tokyo. Every year, many teachers, researchers and students attend JALT to share their experiences, research findings, and thoughts and ideas in the field of language teaching and learning, with an enormous educational materials exposition. Not only that, JALT is also a great place to see friends and meet new people from all over the world.

Last year's JALT was in Kitakyusyu, and it was my first time to take part in such a big conference. I wrote an article about JALT for *Languageing!* last year, with the title, “Amusement Park for Academics.” Using the metaphor of Disney Land, I described JALT as an amusement park, having so many presentations at the same time and the excitement of attending these “attractions.” But this year, I had quite a different experience. This is the story of how I changed my identity from just “going to attractions” at JALT to “being a part of the action”.

This year, I gave a presentation with my adviser, Tim Murphey, about

“language learners’ social construction of identity” at JALT. We described how one Japanese college student studied English during junior high and high school, how her unique beliefs and attitudes toward learning English, such as “I like grammar!” or “I’m good at

reading but not speaking!” contributed to her “social construction of identity”. We also presented how she constructed a new identity as an English learner in college.

Similarly, I have also been constructing and changing my identities at conferences since last year. Though I attended many interesting presentations last year, I felt myself being outside of the community. I sometimes

even felt isolated. I couldn’t help thinking about the fact that I was a student who did not know much about research.

I still remember that when one lady kindly asked me “How are you?” I said to her “I am too young to be here.” (She is actually a good friend now!) But at that time, the age differences, including the teaching experiences, seemed to be a big matter to me, which isolated me and even led me to

**“I started to see myself as being a part of the ‘action’ of the community and started to behave like a member of the community by meeting and talking to many people and sharing ideas with them!”**

behave like a student who actually didn't belong to the community. What a strong influence our beliefs have! This is how I positioned myself at JALT last year.

I believe this is also how many students in English classes may feel. Many junior high school and high school students may position themselves and English as being separate, and think, "English is too difficult for me" or "Of course he can speak English because he is an English teacher! But I am not!!"

Though I am only one year older than last year, at JALT2007, I neither felt "isolated" nor that "I was too young." I was definitely a member of the community! What I changed were my attitudes and beliefs about myself being at conferences. The change came from the fact that I gave a presentation and made a lot of friends at JALT. I started to see myself as being a part of the "action" of the community, and started to behave like a member of the community by meeting and talking to many people and sharing ideas with them!

Without these opportunities, I bet I would still have positioned myself the same way as last year, as "being outside of the community" and I probably would not even want to go in the future. Through constructing

multiple identities over a few years, I learned important lessons:

- 1) Participating is very important to make you feel you are a part of the community.
- 2) Participating is also very important to understand the meaning of your existence in the community.
- 3) Participating is not only important but also necessary for learning.

If you are a teacher, I challenge you not to make your students in your class to feel the same way I felt at JALT last year. I encourage you to give your students a lot of opportunities to participate more, talk a lot, learn a lot, and laugh a lot in your class!

If you are a student, I challenge you not to be passive. Losing the meaning of your existence in the community is the worst scenario. I encourage you to take actions and participate more in class. Don't just go to attractions, but become a part of the action!!!

### **About the writer**

Naoki Yamaura is a graduate student in the Department of English at Dokkyo University. He is soon to complete his thesis on the development of learner identity in foreign language classrooms.

## A Plea for More Democracy in University Education

Akiko Kiuchi, Dokkyo University

I'm the writer of the short letter, "On Education," in the last issue of *Languaging!* To tell the truth, it was not a letter to the magazine, but just a short response to a poster which had been hanging on the door of Mr. Carpenter's office. It was a quote of John Dewey followed by the provocative question, "Education, whatcha' think?"

I have received many positive responses to my letter from students and teachers. In one of them, Mr. Steve Christie and his students invited me to their classes where I had a chance to discuss with them the topic of education. Thanks to them I had a nice time. Most of them didn't have much experience with this type of discussion and neither did I. However I have always believed that we really need to have open discussions in order to live in a tolerant society which realises opinion diversity, generosity and freedom, and prevents powerful people from keeping power in their hands. It's one of the keys of *anti-authoritarian education*, which was promoted in the 60s.

As history tells us, a society which prevents people from questioning *why* creates fascism and racism. In his novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of*

*Being* (1985), which deals with the time of the Prague Spring, Milan Kundera, the famous writer from former Czechoslovakia, says:

*In the realm of totalitarian kitsch, all answers are given in advance and preclude any questions. It follows, then, that the true opponent of totalitarian kitsch is the person who asks questions. A question is like a knife that slices through the stage backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it.*

**"Am I an idealist? It's a pleasure to be an idealist because pliability and absence of ideas have resulted in a society lacking ideals."**

Before our discussion in Mr. Christie's class, we watched two film clips from *Dead Poets Society* and *The Emperor's Club*. The first one, *Dead Poets Society* deals with conflicts between traditional teachers,

who teach their students to pass the entrance exams and to keep the good reputation of the school, and one of the key figures of this film, Mr. Keating, who tries to make his students think how to live extraordinarily, with a saying "Carpe Diem" (*Seize the day!*). He also tells them how important poetry is. "Words and ideas can change the world ... Poetry is remembrance of human life." These days it seems too many people rush to study economics and the importance of words or languages has been forgotten. Literature or

philosophy seems unpractical. Yet human life is based on language. Words create ideas, identity and the world.

Through the discussions in Mr. Christie's class, I realised that we need a student union. At university, we students are treated like kids and university is rife with rules to control us. It's completely undemocratic. We should demand more democracy in university education. Democracy is not just a political system of a state, but it begins in a family where children also have their say. Democracy means participation. We don't participate in the administration of our university because they don't allow us to join it. But students have the right to have their voices heard, to defy the raising of tuition, to say how our money is used, and to oppose rules made in secret. Who decided to build Amano Hall by using our tuition? We need an organisation because we are stronger if we get together. Also we should have a student newspaper which is completely independent from the administration of university. We need student-run media to publish our opinions and to share our ideas and information.

Some of you may think that the open discussion of ideas isn't a part of Japanese culture. However, as long as we have languages, we can make it a part of culture. Through discussion you become familiar with new perspectives, ideas and understanding which make you tolerant and creative. Am I an idealist? It's a pleasure to be an idealist because pliability and absence of ideas have resulted in a

society lacking ideals. Think of the energy of students in the 60s and the 70s. Let's stop being apathetic and cynical. Why are we now starving for words, ideals and philosophy?

In conclusion, I want to mention one thing, we didn't discuss in the classes. Many students at Dokkyo University feel inferior and that they are at a mid-level university and wasting their time. Many wished to go to certain "elite" universities. But have you asked yourself what persuades you that these universities are so "good"? When I was in high school, I visited some elite universities and I have some friends studying at them as well. Yet these universities did the same advertisements as our administration, and my friends at elite universities are no different from my classmates at Dokkyo. Have you ever visited these universities and looked what was really happening there? If you knew what was happening there, you wouldn't think that they are so elite. Hence, the truth is that it is only the belief that the elite universities are "good" that lets them stay at the high positions of elite universities. Because people believe that they are "good" universities, they stay as elite universities. It's a religion. This religion divides us into social classes and elites force this belief on people in order to keep their power. Elites are trying to keep a society which prevents people from questioning why and makes people fear that they are not a part of elites. They use this anxiety to make themselves more important and keep people longing for

status they don't have. People's inferiority about not being elites reinforces the privileged position of elites. This is the "institutionalizing of worth" which Ivan Illich criticised in his book, *Deschooling Society* (1971). Thus, we live in a vicious circle and an illusion. We have to release ourselves from this awful religion. Information about reality can help stop people believing the illusion. That's the key to making society more equal. Let's begin with helping our neighbours to stop feeling inferior and sharing ideas on how we can change our minds. Start an open discussion now!

The world where you now live can have alternatives. The world where you can question *why* is an open world where culture and philosophy are alive. Education is a plea for living in an open world.

I thank all the readers of my short letter. And again, I thank Mr. Christopher Carpenter for the wonderful poster on his door which inspired me to write and helped me to meet nice people.

### About the writer

Akiko Kiuchi is a 4<sup>th</sup> year student of political science and is preparing to study Peace and Conflict Studies in Germany. She hopes to be a journalist.

### Works cited in this article

- Ivan Illich (1971). *Deschooling Society*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.  
 Milan Kundera (1985). *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Trans. by M. H. Heim. London: Faber and Faber.

### Readers Forum

## Comments on "Language teacher, language learner"

Ana Barcelos

19 August 2007

*I really enjoyed Carpenter's article (Languaging! No. 8) on the identities of a language teacher. It resonated with the experience of trying to learn Spanish here in Brazil. Although the language is not spoken here and I don't have to use it in my daily life, I've always wanted to learn it. The opportunity appeared when we had a lecturer from Spain last year. I started the class and was a participant student, though the grammar (despite the similarity with Portuguese) was a bit complicated. But, like John (in the article), I had little time to recycle and study the language outside class. In addition, my beliefs about what a language class should be were very different from the teacher's, who adopted a grammar-contrastive-analysis approach which put me off. I kept asking myself in my head, "Where is the use? How can I say this or that? I need to speak!" Besides this, my participation in conferences around the world and country made me miss some classes. I found myself getting behind and also lacking in motivation due to the conflicts of pedagogical beliefs. Thus, I unfortunately stopped studying Spanish (though I still want to learn).*

(Continued on page 28)



## **Guess What?**

### ***Students Do Care About Their Education After All***

Stephen Christie, Kaori Yamamoto, Erisa Yamamoto,  
Nao Kato, Azusa Nagasawa, Tomomi Shimizu,  
Yamahiro Kawada and other student voices from  
Toyo University and Dokkyo University

In the last issue of *Languaging!*, I found Akiko Kiuchi's letter to the editors answering their question "Education, what'cha think?" I was impressed with Ms Kiuchi's thoughts and even more impressed with the variety of sources she brought to bear on the question. I myself have been considering the role of education in Japanese society and my role in Japan's educational system as a university adjunct professor these past several years. It was C.W. Nicol ("Old Nic's") article in *The Japan Times* newspaper which really got me thinking hard about the topic.

Nicol has been highly regarded in Japan for his tireless environmental activism for over 20 years. His article entitled *Have-Nots Put Elitist Twits to Shame* (June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006) described how Japan's cream of the crop graduates of Todai, Handai and Kyodai who fill the ranks of Japan's bureaucracy were "either brain dead or on another planet" as the new "freshman" to Japan's elite Finance Ministry slept through the lecture presented by this award winning guest speaker. Other colleagues of mine have expressed similar sentiments, speaking of

"zombie students," and what teacher at Japanese universities has not lamented the lack of student engagement during classes. Nicol's sentiments and those of other teachers reflect the position of John Taylor Gatto (New York City and State

Teacher of the Year recipient on numerous occasions) in his book *Dumbing Us Down* (1992), which states that American schools these days effectively stifle the desire of students to learn and cripples their emotional and intellectual growth. The last Joint Tokyo JALT Conference had a

**“If the  
education  
system was  
solid, cram  
schools  
wouldn't be  
necessary to  
begin with,  
would they?”**

presentation on motivating students (Falout, 2007), which in fact is a continuous theme at all the JALT conferences. I myself continuously face the same problem with my students. It leaves one to wonder what is wrong with the educational system which produces students who have no desire to learn. Does the education they receive just beat out of them the innate desire to learn, to discover the world around them?

These were the questions I had while reading Kiuchi's letter to the editors of *Languaging!*. I wanted to know what my students would think

about this topic and, since my student's current assignment was on "opinions," I assigned them to read Akiko's letter and write their opinions on it specifically or "On Education" more generally. The responses were interesting and I asked my students if they would like to have Ms Kiuchi visit the class for a discussion of the issue, the result was overwhelmingly in favor of having her visit the classes and so she was invited. The week following her visit I had the students do small group discussions about their impressions on the class and write up group summaries of their discussions.

If there is one message I got from the experience it is that the students are deeply concerned about the value of their education and that they are becoming increasingly critical of the what has been taking place in the schools, primary, secondary, tertiary and the support schools (*juku* and *yobiko*), in the name of education. Students want to get a good education, not just to be schooled (Gatto, 2003; Illich, 1971). I can only hope that parents and administrators and especially educators will wake up to the concerns of the students. I also hope the students will remember their concerns when they become parents themselves.

What follows are excerpts from those writings and discussions, as well as some responses from students at Toyo University who also had the opportunity to read Akiko's "Letter to the Editor" as part of the media studies course I teach there:

*I read your letter, and I sympathized with your opinion, especially when you said, "To protest against all authority, opportunism and absurdity. To find a way out of immaturity and make diversity together. To live as you are!" In addition, I feel the same way as you when you say you "think education entails conversation with others." I think education has to include conversation. To communicate with others is the most important thing to live. So we must be educated using conversation. But there is less conversation now in Japan. Schools must teach students to get their act together, I think. Anyway, reading your opinion was a good opportunity to think about education. Thanks a lot.*

~Kaori Yamamoto (Toyo U.)

*I agree with you about conversation in Japan. I also think that education entails conversation, but schools in Japan are not a place for conversation, because everyone must have the same way of thinking in Japan. As the saying goes, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." People don't speak face to face often anymore. For these reasons many people can't think critically or speak frankly. I think it is necessary to have more discussion in class. It is very important to know others' opinions in order to conceive new ideas and deepen our own thoughts.*

~Erisa Yamamoto (Dokkyo)

*I read your letter, About Education, in the Readers Forum of Languaging! I*

*sympathized with most of your opinions, especially with your description of Japanese schools. You said that "even the cram schools encourage students to make their colleagues 'enemies,' to 'win' to attend the top schools." I agree with this opinion overall. I think school should be a place to make friends not enemies. A child's job is playing with friends, I think, and through playing children learn social structures and the important things of life. If they become adults without children playing enough, maybe society will reach a state of panic because they don't know how to work with other people well. You say, "Education is already a big business in Japan." Certainly this was cleverly said. It is a funny story, isn't it? If the education system was solid, cram schools wouldn't be necessary to begin with, would they? Finally I want to say thank you, because of you I was able to think about education more seriously.*

~Nao Kato (Dokkyo)

*I'm impressed with your deep thinking. I think the reason why education has become a big part of business in Japan is due to excessive capitalism. I think the present level of capitalism in Japan makes our desires evil. I think many problems in Japan derive from excessive capitalism. I appreciate reading your great opinions. I look forward to meeting you!!!*

~Yamahiro Kawada (Dokkyo)

*Recently on the news I saw that elementary schools in Adachi Ward*

*are being ranked by test grades. Is this really necessary? Elementary school isn't only a place for studying. It is important for elementary school students to do something fun. I think this ranking system is strange. Besides, such a tendency makes elementary school like cram school. Cram school cannot make a culture. ... From now on there is going to be more problems with Japanese education. I was happy to read your letter and recommended books and poems.*

~Azusa Nagasawa (Dokkyo)

*I think Japanese education has many problems. ... Excess education, like private school for entrance examinations, keeps children from playing outside or talking with friends. When their parents make them go to cram school, the problems become more serious. Cram school costs too much, children can't eat dinner with their family, lack of sleep, and so on.*

~Tomomi Shimizu (Dokkyo)

In the group discussions in class after Ms Kiuchi's visit, some students felt that she was too critical. "She has a strong opinion." "She is too critical and a little bit negative." "She planted a bad image of Dokkyo, though we have to spend three more years here!" Another student had this criticism: "She has a good and strong opinion, but why is she going to Germany? She should stay and promote her ideals here in Japan." However, other students found the discussions very stimulating. "After I heard her opinion, I remembered how French students

were (because I was an exchange student in France). I think we have to be more independent and speak our opinion in class. If not, I think it's meaningless to study." Students also said that they really enjoyed having a guest speaker and the opportunity to exchange ideas. Some students said they wished they had prepared more for the occasion. "We didn't prepare our opinions or questions much and we didn't have much to say about education," said one student. "We could have had a debate about education with her. In the future, students should prepare more for such classes. However, we felt inviting a guest is a good experience because we can exchange ideas and it is good chance to know what other people are thinking."

### About the teacher

Stephen Christie has been challenging students to think at Dokkyo University for nine years and presently teaches in the newly formed Department of Language and Culture.

### Works cited in this article

- Falout, J. (2007, October 14). *Re-motivating the Demotivated*. From a presentation at The 2nd JALT Joint Tokyo Conference, Tokyo, Japan.
- Gatto, J. (1992). *Dumbing Us down*. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers.
- Gatto, J. (2003). Against School: How Public Education Cripples Our Kids, and Why. *Harper's Magazine*, September 2003.
- Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling Society*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Nicol, C.W. (2006, June 7). Have-nots put elite twits to shame. *The Japan Times* (Tokyo), p. 13.

(Continued from Readers Forum, page 24)

*But another similarity to John was how we teachers, when learning another language other than the one we teach, start to demand we "walk our talk" (as Tim Murphey says)! I'm acting like my students! I tell them they should be dedicated and study, and yet I myself don't do it. This is also similar to what I feel sometimes as a teacher trainer. I am always checking myself to see if what I do in class is the same as what I am telling my students to do (of course, I don't always tell them what to do, but try to make them decide for themselves what would be the best option). It's tough sometimes.*

*Anyhow, I just wanted to share my opinions with you. I'm a great fan of Languaging! and I'll take this opportunity to congratulate you all on putting this wonderful virtual forum for us teachers and students. I feel inspired by its articles, ideas (which I have used) and by the idea of the journal itself that reminds us participation and collaboration are key to pathways thinking. It feels good to be part of this community of practice. It has inspired me to DO more things, instead of just thinking and preparing for it.*

*Cheers,*

**Ana Maria Ferreira Barcelos**  
Departamento de Letras e Artes  
Universidade Federal de Viçosa  
Viçosa, Brasília

### Readers!

**Languaging!** wants your feedback! Please send us your comments, reactions and reflections, however brief, positive or critical. One way is to use the form in the **Languaging! Readers Forum**. Alternatively, you can send your comments by email to

[languaging@yahoo.com](mailto:languaging@yahoo.com)

In the subject line, write "Readers Forum." Please tell us which article you are commenting on.

# ***The Wisdom of Crowds and ELT: Decentralizing, Aggregating, and Acting***

*A book inspired essay*

Tim Murphey, Dokkyo University

In his book, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (2004), James Surowiecki bounces off the common view of the "madness of crowds" (which he admits can happen at times) and posits that the opposite is more often the case. Surowiecki makes readers more sensitive to the advantages of asking many knowledgeable people for their opinions, guesses, and ideas and averaging or aggregating their views to form an intelligent response. He cites lots of research showing that large, diverse, and knowledgeable groups of people working together on a problem *are* much more likely to come up with an effective plan, activity, move, position, etc. than any small group of experts—especially when the small group members are overly similar.

Surowiecki contends that the wisdom of crowds has repeatedly been demonstrated through decentralization. He warns us, however, that "decentralization" has become a buzz word and is sometimes over generalized in inappropriate ways. If we decentralize and allow for more local control and knowledge building, he contends we still need ways to aggregate the information, i.e. the

wisdom of the community. This, he says was the problem with the intelligence community in the US pre 9/11 - there was no clearinghouse that aggregated all the information and looked for patterns. Or as the saying goes, the right hand did not know what the left was doing.

**"It seems clear, however, that beyond asking what people want and aggregating their answers, we need to act upon their wisdom."**

We can apply the idea of *the wisdom of crowds* to our own situations as teachers at several levels. If we really want to know how we teach, we can ask the crowds who know the most about our particular teaching—our students. Student action logs (Murphey, 1992) are one

way to aggregate student information for our individual professional development. Often in action logs, learners write about how they are learning and much of the information is valuable for other learners. When teachers collect (aggregate) student strategies and comments in a newsletter for other students to read, everybody in the class potentially benefits from the wisdom of the group, not only the teacher. Sharing the results in our professional publications disperses this local knowledge to an even wider group of teachers. Journals

such as the *Modern Language Journal* attempt in part to aggregate reports of many doctoral dissertations and book reviews in a brief format so that the wisdom of the crowds can be disseminated.

On a still larger scale of educational research, if we wanted to know more about how our educational systems are working, maybe we should ask large numbers of students to reflect and give us their impressions. For example, at present there are several hundred Japanese, Brazilian, and Finish language learning histories (LLHs) aggregated on the web pages at Vera Menezes website for researchers to use and learn from as they wish. Surveys and questionnaires are another way to do this. The article "Horses Mouth" (Murphey 2002), asked 100 university English majors, "What did you like and not like about your JHS and HS classes?" This past year we (Elwood, Falout, Hood, & Murphey, in progress) have started looking at similar data aggregated from 440 students in four universities, from many different departments, and feel we are getting better general wisdom back from a diverse and knowledgeable crowd. Such open questionnaires may later be converted into questionnaires for wider use to aggregate even more feedback from the crowds.

So far we have looked at getting the good wisdom from diverse and knowledgeable groups. Now, let's look at a few examples of the problems with small homogenous hierarchal groups who may be dysfunctional in

their procedures. Of course, dominant paradigms in any field will often try to marginalize some views and some of the wisdom of crowds may go unheeded (see such a history in SLA in Block, 2002). Or, there may be a strong hierarchy that does not listen to the crowds, as in the case of the war in Iraq - reportedly about 70% of the American public were against going into Iraq.

The first dysfunctional groups that immediately come to mind are of course those in Washington DC that decide behind closed doors to go to war. Surowiecki writes of the Bay of Pigs disaster during Kennedy's presidency which parallels the similar misinformed stupidity of America's invasion of Iraq. In any situation where you have an "old boys" network that has bonded into blindness with a strong prejudice against diversity and opposing views, you have a recipe for at least mediocrity and at worst self-destruction.

I suspect that MEXT may be in danger of such homogeneity with the old boys at most universities and afraid to take a stand on what the wisdom of the crowds say. They do mouth the wisdom of the crowds in saying they want to create "Japanese with English abilities" but they have not, for example, required listening on all university entrance exams, as China and Korea have done for many years, nor have they deregulated their highly controlled textbook market and let the wisdom of the market take over, moves that without a doubt would be unpopular in certain circles, but

nevertheless benefit general education.

I often cite the Japanese kotowaza "Asking is a moment's embarrassment. Not asking may be a life-long regret" (聞くは一時の恥、聞かぬは一生の恥). It seems clear however that beyond asking what people want and aggregating their answers, we need to act upon their wisdom. Classroom teachers can act at the classroom level to some degree on what their students tell them helps and does not help. However, it remains to be seen if the governments of the people actually act according to the wisdom of the people, rather than simply on corporate interests alone.

As academic researchers it is time to humble ourselves and listen to the overwhelming wisdom of the aggregated voices of our students. May we find more ways to let them speak and be heard. And most importantly, may we and our leaders

have the courage to act upon their wisdom.

### About the writer

Tim Murphey is a language teacher and researcher at Dokkyo University and beyond. Recently he has been investigating the wisdom of crowds through attribution analysis of language learning histories.

### Works cited in this article

- Block, D. (2002). *The social turn in SLA*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Elwood, Falout, Hood, & Murphey (in progress). Looking back; Secondary English education. *JAL T2007 Proceedings*.
- Menezes, Vera (n.d.) Aggregated Language Learning Histories.  
<http://www.veramenezes.com/amfale.htm>
- Murphey, T. (2002). From the horse's mouth Advice from second-semester Japanese university students to JHS/HS English teachers in Japan. *Learning Learning*, 9 (1), 2-10.
- Surowiecki, J. (2004). *The Wisdom of Crowds*. N.Y.: Doubleday.



## Documentary Sites



The following websites all offer free video documentary content and are excellent sources of high interest, authentic listening for English learners and teachers.

**Australian Network: Nexus**  
<http://australiannetwork.com/nexus/>

*Like the BBC in the UK, this website from ABC offers a wealth of video materials and cultural snapshots of "The Land Downunder," with ample support for language learners.*

**Frontline WORLD**  
<http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/>

*A series of mini-documentaries developed for the American PBS network. While not specifically for language learners, these short explorations of a wide range of regional and global issues are accompanied by extensive supplemental materials that can be used to scaffold comprehension.*

**FreeDocumentaries.org**  
<http://freedocumentaries.org/>

*Full length documentaries such as Bowling for Columbine, The Road to Guantanamo, and other contemporary, award-winning titles. This site offers the least support for learners, but is still a valuable resource for advanced learners and teachers developing their own support materials.*

Do you use documentaries for language teaching or language study? Write down your approach and experiences and publish them in *Languaging!* For more website recommendations see

**Languaging!Links** online at  
<http://www.geocities.com/languaging/links.html>

# ***Students' Confidence and Anxiety in L2 Speaking Activities***

Sarah Osboe, Tomoko Fujimura, Rob Hirschel  
Kanda University of International Studies

Each April, a fresh contingent of students begin their studies at Japanese universities. Most of these students have spent a considerable amount of time and energy developing English language skills. Why then do some students experience a tremendous amount of anxiety when communicating in English? Why do some students lack the confidence to fully express themselves in the English language? How can students, teachers, and support staff best address these issues of anxiety and confidence to assist language learners in moving beyond such limitations? The following is a brief report of ongoing research into second language (L2) learner speaking confidence.

## **Research Questions**

1. What factors influence L2 student confidence in speaking English?
2. How can students, teachers, and support staff best address these issues of anxiety and confidence to assist language learners in moving beyond such limitations?

## **Methods**

This research project has taken two routes: a questionnaire and several focus groups. For the first part of this study, the researchers administered an

internet-based questionnaire to 62 participants in their first semester of university. For the second part of this study, the researchers held focus groups with first year students. The methodology, resulting data, and analyses are described below.

## **Questionnaire**

The survey data was collected from 62 freshman participants using Survey Monkey online software. The participants all speak Japanese as their first language (L1) and are studying English as an L2. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 30 items with multiple parts.

The researchers, with the help of an experienced in-house statistician, exported the data from Survey Monkey and ran analyses of the data using SPSS. The researchers had accumulated a wealth of data (given 30 items with multiple parts) and decided to examine four main categories:

1. Confidence Speaking in the English classroom versus L2 Proficiency level
2. Confidence Speaking in the English classroom versus Study Abroad experience
3. Confidence Speaking in the English classroom versus L1 personality factors
4. Confidence with different speakers versus L2 Proficiency level

Confidence Speaking in the English Classroom: The researchers used the



following five statements to determine *Confidence Speaking in the English Classroom*. The students were asked to mark their responses on a likert scale with the following levels: 1. very comfortable, 2. comfortable, 3. a little uncomfortable, and 4. very uncomfortable.

- a) The teacher asks you a question in front of the entire class.
- b) The teacher asks you to find/choose a partner.
- c) The teacher asks you to speak with a partner.
- d) The teacher asks you to have a small group discussion.
- e) You have a question to ask in front of the entire class.

The responses to the five questions above were collapsed into one metric and measured against study abroad experience, L2 proficiency level, and L1 personality factors.

Confidence speaking in the English classroom by Level: The differences in confidence between upper and lower proficiency levels were not found to be statistically significant. Instead, it appeared that situational factors such as large group versus pairings better predicted confidence than did language proficiency.

Confidence speaking in the English classroom by Study Abroad experience: The researchers looked at L2 confidence in the classroom and controlled for whether or not the students had studied abroad. Though interesting patterns occurred, as with proficiency level (noted above), the results were not found to be statistically significant.

Confidence speaking in the English classroom by L1 personality factors: The researchers were interested in knowing if aspects of introversion/extroversion in the L1 (Japanese) were predictive of confidence speaking English in the classroom. The personality factors were measured by the following questions:

1. If you're with a group of 5 friends in Japan who are looking for a restaurant, how often would you be the one to ask for directions?
2. If you're with a group of friends in a video store, how often will you give your suggestion for a movie?
3. If you're taking a trip with friends, how often will you do the planning?
4. In Japanese classrooms, if the teacher asks the class a question in Japanese, how often do you raise your hand?

The students were asked to answer in accordance with the following likert scale: 1. very often, 2. often, 3. sometimes, and 4. never. After performing a Pearson correlation, a small but statistically significant correlation was found at the .05 level.

Confidence with different speakers by L2 Proficiency level: The researchers were interested in determining if type of interlocutor played a role in the participants' speaking confidence. The data show a small but statistically significant difference between the students of upper and lower proficiency levels. The students of lower proficiency indicated a slightly higher level of confidence in speaking English with other Japanese students of English.

### Questionnaire Data Discussion

As reported above, neither study

abroad experience nor L2 proficiency was found to be predictive of speaking confidence. Not surprisingly, a small but statistically significant correlation was found between L1 personality factors (extroversion/introversion) and L2 speaking confidence in the classroom. It is intuitive that students who are more expressive in their L1 will tend to have greater confidence when speaking in the L2. Interestingly, there was also a small, but statistically significant correlation between the lower proficiency level students and their comfort in speaking with Japanese students. It appears that some students less proficient in English felt more comfortable speaking with Japanese interlocutors than did their cohorts of a greater proficiency level. Perhaps students of a higher English level feel silly communicating in the L2 when Japanese communication would be easier, more natural, and straightforward. Perhaps there is a greater awareness among higher level students of the disconnect between the thoughts they would like to express, and the thoughts that they are able to express. It is the opinion of the researchers that more studies of a qualitative nature should be undertaken to more fully understand the level of confidence experienced by L2 learners when speaking the L2.

The researchers feel that the lack of statistically significant data is not necessarily indicative of little to no correlation between the factors examined and L2 speaking confidence in the classroom. There were a number of shortcomings in this questionnaire study. First, at 62 respondents, the sample size was much too small, and at 30 items, the questionnaire was a bit too long. In the future, the researchers aim to reduce the number of items and repeat the same questions in multiple formats in order to

achieve greater reliability.

A second concern is that students were asked to self-report their levels of confidence in varied situations. One student may mark 1. very comfortable and another 2. comfortable, though both students have identical feelings. The problem is that it is extremely difficult to quantify a feeling like confidence.

A third concern is certainly that the students self-selected to be part of this study. It is not overly difficult to imagine that students who choose to participate in a foreign language research study are likely to enjoy greater levels of confidence overall.

A final concern is that the researchers are examining individual differences in learners. It is therefore expected that there is going to be difficulty in finding results that are generalizable to a larger population of learners.

### **Focus Group**

The focus group data was collected from eight voluntary freshman participants. The researchers facilitated discussion among participants and began with a set of questions about students' confidence in different situations. The students were further encouraged to respond to each others' comments. The focus group discussions lasted approximately 40 minutes.

### Teacher Factors

*Instructional Factors:* Instructionally, the data indicates that teachers need to make clear to students that making mistakes in class is acceptable. Also, assignments that are given in class should be appropriate to students' ability levels so that they can be successful.

*Non-Instructional Factors:* The focus

group data seems to indicate that students expect teachers to be friendly and approachable, which may help lower students' anxiety.

Group/Interlocutor Factors: Students in the focus groups seemed to prefer speaking in small groups to speaking in front of the whole class. In terms of speaking with Japanese peers in English, different opinions were found. One participant indicated discomfort in speaking English with native speakers of Japanese because it felt "weird." Another participant felt comfortable speaking with Japanese people because of perceived similar linguistic challenges.

Topic Factors: The participants reported that the combination of group size and the nature of conversational topics affected their speaking confidence. Content that is familiar and easy to understand appears to facilitate their speaking.

Changes in Confidence: A few participants reported a decrease in their confidence from the time of their entrance to university, for reasons such as comparisons with other students and a perceived realization of insufficient speaking ability. However, the participants also indicated that this decrease in confidence was sometimes a motivating factor in their English learning.

Strategies: Some participants reported that useful strategies for increasing their speaking confidence include activities undertaken outside of class, such as talking with friends, sending e-mails, learning useful phrases, and participating

in extra learning tasks. It should be noted that this question was not asked of all focus group participants, so generalizability is limited.

### Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire study suggest that there is a correlation between students' willingness to express themselves in their L1 and their confidence in speaking their L2. Students' proficiency level in the L2 may also correlate with comfort speaking to other L2 learners. Finally, students appear to enjoy greater confidence in pairs and small groups respectively than in whole class situations, regardless of proficiency level.

The results of the focus group study suggest that teacher behavior plays a large role in how confidently students use the L2 in class. Small group discussions and topics that are familiar to students can enhance the level of comfort.

Future research will continue to adopt a two-pronged approach, including the administration of a revised questionnaire with more participants. The questionnaire will focus on situational and group factors about which teachers may have greater control so that practical applications to the classroom can be generated. The researchers may also pursue a diary study of several participants to look more fully into changes in students' confidence and anxiety over time.

*This research is currently being funded by the Research Institute of Language Studies (RILS) at Kanda University of International Studies.*

# What Kind of English Do Japanese Students Want to Learn?

Tetsuya Fukuda · Dokkyo University

## Introduction

English teachers, native or Japanese, sometimes talk about the differences between American English and British English, or between native speakers' English and other versions. Some textbooks and some English conversation schools boast that they use the most widely appreciated kind of English, or that they teach "genuine" English. But what kind of English do Japanese students really want to learn? American English, British English, or another kind? I conducted a survey in September, 2006 on what kind of English his students wanted to learn. I asked them both what kind of English they wanted to speak and what kind of English they wanted to write. The results are quite interesting. Most respondents said they wanted to speak and write American English or British English (i.e. the dominant native-speaker dialects). However, in a similar survey conducted in Osaka, only a third of the students answered they wanted American or British English as their model.

## Survey

All the sixty-six students who participated in this survey were freshmen at Dokkyo University, thirty-five of whom were male, and

the other thirty-one were female. In terms of age, more than 90% of them were eighteen or nineteen years old, and only five of them were over twenty. Their majors were German or economics and none of them majored in English.

To the question of what kind of English they wanted to speak, the students answered as follows:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| <i>American English</i> | 55% |
| <i>British English</i>  | 18% |
| <i>Others</i>           | 3%  |
| <i>Don't Care</i>       | 32% |

To the question of what kind of English they wanted to write, they answered as follows:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| <i>American English</i> | 52% |
| <i>British English</i>  | 12% |
| <i>Others</i>           | 5%  |
| <i>Don't Care</i>       | 38% |

Compared to speaking, more students don't care what kind of English they write. However, generally speaking, most students want to speak and write American or British English.

## Analysis

Let us compare the results with a similar survey conducted at Kansai Foreign Language University (Kubota,

2004). In this survey, university students majoring in English were asked what kind of English they wanted to have as a model. The results are as follows:

|                                    |     |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>British or American English</i> | 30% |
| <i>Inner Circle</i>                | 40% |
| <i>Inner and Outer Circle</i>      | 12% |
| <i>Don't care</i>                  | 18% |

"Inner circle" and "outer circle" are terms developed by Kachru (1992). The inner circle means countries where English is the dominant language, such as the US, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. The outer circle refers to countries where English plays wide and important roles in education and governance, such as India, Singapore and South Africa.

As already seen, over 70% of Dokkyo students answered they wanted to speak American English or British English. However, only 30% of Kansai Gaidai students want British or American English as their model. There is a huge gap here, but the difference can be seen more clearly when we look at another survey carried out of the views Japanese high school students have toward how to pronounce English. Matsuda asked thirty-four high school students in Tokyo whether they would agree with the statement that they wanted to pronounce English like American or British people (Matsuda, 2003). The results show that 84% of the students answered they strongly agree or they agree with the statement.

Although the wording of these

three surveys is not the same, the results could roughly be summarized as follows (see Figure 1): 84% of the high school students want to pronounce English as American or British people. 73% of the university students who do not major in English want to speak English as American or British people do. On the other hand, only 30% of the university students who major in English want American or British English as their model.

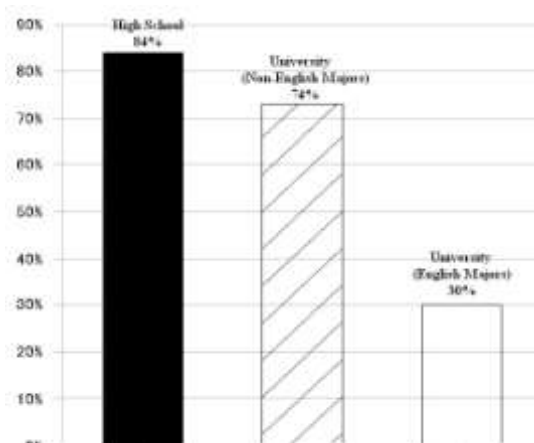


Figure 1: Students who want to speak American or British English

## Discussion

These differences are possibly caused by the fact that those majoring in English tend to be more aware of the variety of "Englishes." That is, it is increasingly argued that any kind of English should be respected as such, as long as the communication is conducted in English successfully. Therefore, English majors tend not to care about the kind of English they speak.

I personally think every learner of English as a foreign language should be exposed to this way of thinking. Students who major in English may

have the opportunity to take courses in which the idea of "World Englishes" is introduced, as is shown in the example of the *Asian Englishes* course offered as a lecture workshops at Dokkyo University (Asaoka, 2006). But non-English majors should also learn this idea. I am not arguing that English learners should not try to speak English as native speakers do. I believe that just introducing the idea of World Englishes can help make learners more relaxed. It is widely said that Japanese English learners are too afraid of making mistakes when they speak English, and it is the key to success as a learner of English to realize that they can make mistakes and still be able to communicate in English successfully, even if they do

not pronounce English as American or British people do.

### About the writer

Tetsuya Fukuda is a lecturer in the Zenkari Interdepartmental English Program at Dokkyo University.

### Works cited in this article

- Asaoka, C. (2006). *Asian Englishes: A Content-Based Lecture Workshop Course. Languaging! No.7*, 23.
- Kubota, M. (2004). Native speaker: A unitary fantasy of a diverse reality. *The Language Teacher*, 28 (1), 3-10.
- Krachu, B.B. (1992). *The Other Tongue: English Across Cultures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. University of Illinois Press.
- Matsuda, A. (2003). The ownership of English in Japanese secondary schools. *World Englishes*, 22 (4), 483-496.

### ANNOUNCING:

## Brown Bag Tuesdays

**OPEN, INFORMAL PRESENTATION SERIES: WAYS TO MAKE OUR JOBS EASIER, MORE FUN AND MORE EFFECTIVE**



**Hey teachers!** Curious about what other teachers are doing in their classes? Interested in learning new ideas, but don't have time for conferences? Then **bring your lunch or bento**, and join us once a week for a short, informal discussion with **colleagues** and occasional **invited speakers** about **activities and materials, ways to improve our classes**, and other topics related to **teaching and learning languages**.

On Tuesdays, eat your lunch with us at the **Brown Bag Tuesdays Presentation Series** in the new **Lecturer's Lounge (第二講師室)** from **12:25 to 12:55** (only 30 minutes with plenty of time to get ready for class before 3<sup>rd</sup> period starts). Don't be shy! Don't wear a tie! Just come and join us in sharing ideas on **how to make our jobs easier, more fun, and more effective**.

**DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR LUNCH!!!**

Dec 11<sup>th</sup> ~

**Christmas Materials Share Session: Starring YOU!** Bring your best old X-mas activities and trade them for some new ones. Sign up with Christmas Carpenter for 1 to 5 minutes of fame!

Got a good suggestion for who or what you would like to see in the series?  
Let us know! Contact: [chris@dokkyo.ac.jp](mailto:chris@dokkyo.ac.jp)

四  
字  
熟  
語

## Yoji Jukugo

*Expressing a Complete Message  
in Just Four Character Combinations*

Jeroen Bode · Tsukuba University Foreign Language Centre

### Introduction

With this article I would like to discuss a very interesting matter concerning Japanese in its written form. As a starting point, we can not deny the importance of the regular contact of Japan with China and taking over Chinese culture in earlier times. One of the outcomes of this was the development of a unique Japanese script combining pure Chinese characters with a phonetic script (both *hiragana* and *katakana*). My research is centered specifically into the place and importance of *yoji jukugo* (四字熟語) within learning Japanese as a foreign language. However, first of all, what are they, and what are they not. Sometimes you will see or read phrases linked together with four characters but they are not considered *yoji jukugo*. To learn them all is not possible, but to learn those that are still in current use might be helpful in time. In proper use, it can facilitate a more smooth way of expressing one's thoughts.

### What are (*yoji*) *jukugo*?

The second half of the term *yoji jukugo* is described in Japanese dictionaries<sup>1</sup> as a combination of Chinese characters and normally

consists of more than two characters in a compound. They refer to the combinations of three<sup>2</sup> or more combinations. The phrases made up with four characters combined have most of the time an idiomatic meaning and they have extended messages beyond the actual meaning of the individual or set components. They have their origin in Chinese sources, such as literature, Buddhist scriptures, philosophical writings or other source materials. In some cases the number of characters can exceed even more, especially in the cases of laws and names of diseases<sup>3</sup>. But these are not considered in this study. Since they are not required in general use of Japanese learned as a foreign language. Although I consider mainly the four compound characters in my study, it is important to recognize the particular peculiarities in the use of characters. Characters can be used individually for its meaning, or grouped into sets of two, three, or four, and even into larger numbers. For example, the character 本 (*hon, moto*) can refer to a "book" or "origin" by itself and in the combination of two it is possible to form the noun for bookshelves 本棚.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 広辞苑、岩波書店 第五版

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 三字熟語語源小辞典、加納善光、講談社、2001年

<sup>3</sup> E.g. negligence resulting in injury (過失傷害罪) and bacterial meningitis(細菌性髄膜炎)

The three character compounds for Japanese language consists of three characters written 日本語 (read *nihongo*). These are actually very simple examples, but it shows that characters can be structured together in longer strings. There are longer possibilities but the tendency is to shorten it to a more manageable length. For example, *eiken* (英検) has in its full name 8 characters<sup>4</sup>. I give this example because it immediately shows the problem how to read longer strings or structures of characters and where to break the complete structure in smaller units for a clearer comprehension. This is also happening with phrases of only four characters in total. The basic question is how the phrase is built up and how it is used in its grammatical sense.<sup>5</sup>

In my introduction I already mentioned the difficulty of recognizing *yoji jukugo* from other four character compounds. Although the author of the article above admonishes us to be careful when consulting the book *Yoji Jukugo no Dokuhon* (四字熟語の読本)<sup>6</sup>, I would like to suggest using the term *kanji yoji* (漢字四字) therein as the general name for the whole group of four characters. The *yoji jukugo* could then be considered as one group and could facilitate more quickly a decision in classifying and finding its meaning if not known. The other group could be considered as the group of new linked compounds (we could name it: *shinsei jukugo* - 新製熟語).

### A questionnaire: *Yoji jukugo* in current Japanese

With this as background information, let me illustrate the matter further

through some examples based on the questionnaire I am, primarily, using to find out the frequency of *yoji jukugo* in current Japanese. As a secondary purpose the data can be used in the preparing of Japanese language textbooks for non-natives. The questionnaire consists of six questions (a number to insure the amount of return) and on the other side for reference 211 *yoji jukugo*. The first question is related to the frequency of using these phrases, while the remaining five questions center on the use of *yoji jukugo* in a practical sense, namely, in spoken and written Japanese, but also when read in books, newspapers or magazines. The last two questions cover personal preferences. The respondents are limited to people between 20 - 70 years old and are asked to write down also their occupations. With this we can see if there are differences in age groups and whether occupations result in specific uses. I included as respondents the academic educational field (including driving school instructors), members of the self-defense forces (but also members from the police force and fire department). But also other occupations were considered like farmers, students, housewives. I have also included the possibility to specify by the respondents themselves their occupation. The main reason I decided to start a questionnaire came from the fact that, regarding these four character phrases and proverbs, specialized dictionaries<sup>7</sup> do not deal with the matter of which phrases are still in current use or not and should be learned by non-native speakers of Japanese for smooth communication skills.

The regular Japanese language books: such as *Japanese for Busy People*, or

<sup>4</sup> Eiken (英検) is short for: 実用英語技能検定

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 「日本語と言語学:『四字熟語の品詞性を問う』123~135頁」、明治書院、玉村文郎編

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 四字熟語の読本、小学館、1988年

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 新明解 四字熟語辞典、三省堂 1998年



*Minna no Nihongo*<sup>8</sup>, do not, or only sparsely include *yōji jukugo* within the language units. For example *isshōkenmei* (一生懸命) is introduced as a language phrase but without further details. Explained merely as: "with all one's effort" in *Minna no Nihongo* (p.101). Other phrases of four characters that are given are:

*kōtsū jikō* (交通事故)

- traffic accident (p.162)

*kaigai ryokō* (海外旅行)

- foreign travel (p.79)

*honjitsu kyūgyō* (本日休業)

- closed today (p.64)

*shiyō kinshi* (使用禁止)

- do not use (p.64)

These, however, do not belong to the group of *yōji jukugo* and could be considered the *shinsei jukugo* mentioned earlier.

### Some examples from the questionnaire

Besides merely listing a few examples, I would like to introduce them with some additional useful information regarding meaning, origin and current use. At the end of the *yōji-jukugo* list I will also include some cases where the compound consists of four characters but are not considered to be *yōji jukugo*. The list is, however, preliminary because of all the 350 forms sent out I received about half back (156). Possibly the number will go up in time. The data in 32 cases I have surveyed and analysed in the amount of occurrences. Sometimes respondents gave the same phrase more than once in their answers due to the way I made the questionnaire.

Predominantly appears the phrase

*isshōkenmei* (一生懸命 - [Do something] with all one's effort [with one's whole life on the line].) in the answers: 36 times. It seems that the origin of the phrase lies within warrior class of Japan expressing a total commitment to one's tasks.

On the second place is *ichigo ichie* (一期一会 - Every encounter is unique.) appears 15 times. It is a concept from the Japanese tea ceremony. Perhaps, it is because of the cultural background of some of these phrases that they are not widely incorporated in teaching Japanese language as a foreign language.

*Yūjū fudan* (優柔不断) occurs 10 times and is in Japanese English dictionary given as meaning *indecision*. The whole compound is placed in the category of expressions referring to human character and the two sets express the same meaning. Most four character phrases are placed in groups of general meanings in *yōji jukugo* dictionaries. The former two are respectively placed in the groups of meaning like: [personal] efforts and aspects of human life.

*Jiyū jizai* (自由自在) has a lower number of five occurrences. It is the first and third character that are the same and the two parts seems to repeat the same basic meaning of doing something as one pleases or likes without restrictions (*jizai*). It is classified in dictionaries as expressions of means, manner and ways, or vaguely as referring to human life.

The last in this set is the phrase *rinki ōhen* (臨機応変) also appears 10 times. It could be understood as adapting to the circumstances. The phrase is built up with two sets of characters with similar meanings. It seems to have its origin in Chinese literature and is classified to the group as a practical principle in life.

The actual number of phrases is much bigger than the five given here, but in terms of frequency they recur less often.

<sup>8</sup> Japanese for Busy People III: Student Book (p.103), or *Minna no Nihongo* 初級 II/Translation and Grammatical Notes (p.101 & p.105)

Sometimes they are only given by one or two respondents.

### The non-yoji jukugo compounds

It is interesting to see that respondents give combinations that are not considered *yoji jukugo* in the consulted dictionaries. To cite a few cases *kentai itchi* (剣体一致) and the homophone *kentai itchi* (懸体一致) are used to express basic principles in Japanese swordsmanship (*kendô*). The first one refers to the coordination of sword and body. The second one means basically the unity between defense and attack. But also *kôtsû anzen* (交通安全) finds itself in back in the answers. Most of the time you will see this phrase in road signs to make drivers observe safe driving.

Less commonly known, *Jiyû jison* (自由自存) is not even given as a *yoji jukugo* in these kinds of special dictionaries, but the basic meaning can tentatively be deduced from its components; possibly meaning freedom and independence. Another uncertain combination is *fushin jikkô* (不信実行). Possibly it has a meaning something close to insincere practice/action.

### Writing mistakes

Sometimes there are small mistakes. Tenka taihei 天下泰平 is confused for the part of taihei as 太平. The basic meaning is still understood: "all is peaceful under Heaven". Sometimes the mistakes are even smaller, like in one case. Shikô sakugo 試行錯誤 (trial and error) is written with the character 錫 for the third character. The small mistakes are, considering the difficulty of some of these phrases, rather few in number.

### Conclusion

With these rather preliminary remarks so far I hope I have shown to you a very interesting linguistic phenomenon within the Japanese language. With the questionnaire it would be possible to use its data in compiling a specialised bilingual dictionary. In the follow up article I would like to discuss further details regarding the way I did the questionnaire and updating the results.

### About the writer

Since 2005, Jeroen has worked for Tsukuba University Foreign Language Centre as a part-time lecturer. He is also does work translating Japanese texts into English (or Dutch) for companies in Tokyo.

*Upcoming publication from the Dokkyo community:*

## Crossing borders: Examples in practice

Tim Murphey, Keiko Okada, Yuka Iijima, & Chitose Asaoka

"Compartmentalized learning in schools often restricts the variety that is available to us in the real world where, usually, we have chances to regularly cross borders and learn from diversity. Crossing borders may lead us into more uncertainty than we generally encounter in our isolated classrooms, but this uncertainty can be the source of much learning, e.g. learning to adapt and adjust. In this article we present narrative examples of our border crossings with students and teachers along with the benefits and occasional challenges. We hope these examples will allow readers to identify their own border crossings and give them courage to attempt them more often."

*In the January 2008 issue of "The Language Teacher" – Don't miss it!*

# ***Students as Researchers***

## ***Part 1***

Masayasu Sakaguchi, University of Tsukuba

Students are learners. This usually means that they need someone to show them ways to learn, but they do not have to be passive all the time. If they have opportunities to be active or if they are eager to learn, they can make full use of their potential. This was the case with me as I discovered through a project I recently participated in. From September 2006 until July 2007, I was a member of a project called the Learning School which was in its seventh year. It is a student-centered educational research project with an international dimension. The researchers are all recently graduated students from one of the eleven schools involved in the Global Classroom Partnership, or in one of its projects. In Part 1 of this essay, the international conference called the Global Classroom will be introduced together with my experiences participating in it. In Part 2, to be published in the following issue of *Languaging!* I will discuss my experiences in the Seventh Annual Learning School.

The Global Classroom is an international exchange program established in 1988 when Anderson High School from Shetland Islands (Scotland) created a link with Gymnasium Zlin in the Czech Republic. At that time the link was mainly for both short-term and long-term student exchanges which enabled students to experience and learn about different lives in Europe. During the next few years, Anderson High School continued to form

similar partnerships with other schools in Europe, South Africa and Japan. In 1997, the first Global Classroom Conference (GCC) was held in Shetland Islands where students from each partner schools met over a two week period and discussed international themes and issues

**“One of the ways to get rid of prejudice can be to let young people communicate with people who are different.”**

concerning today's global society. I participated in the GCC six times from 2002 to 2007 in the Czech Republic, Scotland, Sweden, South Africa, Japan and Germany. In this article, I will describe the details of three conferences (2002, 2003 and 2004) in which I was directly involved in discussions as student participant (2002) or as a student coordinator (2003 and 2004). I also participated in

2005 as a guest in South Africa, in 2006 as a Learning School member in Japan and in 2007 again as a guest in Germany. I will talk about those experiences in the subsequent article.

### ***GCC2002, the Czech Republic***

In 2002, “Media,” “Gender” and “Health” were chosen as the themes of the GCC conference in the Czech Republic. In the discussion of “Media,” “How can we control and defend ourselves from media?” was the main concerns of the students. Through the discussions, the majority of the students pointed out the importance of protecting children from inappropriate information from media since they were too young to know what is good and what is

bad. It was concluded that this could be achieved by creating opportunities for children to learn about media. Another concern in the topic was "The Internet vs. Books": whether there will be a time when the Internet entirely takes over the role of books. The comment I thought interesting was: "I guess human beings tend to like materials, meaning they prefer paper to pure data."

In the theme of "Gender," the main concerns were "Gender equality at work" and "Discrimination against homosexuals." A lot of students were very positive about women getting involved more in managerial positions at work. The main concern discussed was that there should be more flexible maternity leave systems. I found it very interesting that European students had clearer ideas over the problems with homosexuals compared to Japanese students. It could be seen that in Europe people talk about sexuality, including their homosexuality, more than we do in Japan.

In the theme of "Health," "problems with HIV/AIDS," "the legalization of drugs," and "problems with smoking" were the main concerns of the discussions. The HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa seemed to be rather serious, and many South African students were aware of it. We came to the conclusion again that, as in the theme of "Media," children having proper education surely was the key to solve the problem.

### **GCC2003, Shetland Islands**

In 2003, "Values and Citizenship," "Crime and Punishment" and "Globalization" were the themes of the conference. In "Values and Citizenship," four subtopics were decided, which were "Active Citizenship," "Ambition vs. Modesty," "Family Community Spirit" and "Acceptance, Tolerance and Equality." Through the discussions, students from

each country were asked to explain the situations in their own countries related to the subtopics. The interesting outcomes were that when students presented the situations in their countries, it seemed to be difficult for the society to accept all the values, however through the GCC, although students certainly had different values, they tried to understand and accept each other through the communication made possible by the conference. I feel this could happen because the students were aged 15-18. We were innocent enough to try to accept people and evaluate their ideas through our communication rather than by what we had heard from others.

Under the topic of "Crime and Punishment", the interesting theme discussed was that of "the problem with criminals getting discriminated against when they are out of jails." Swedish students and Czech students stated this was the most important issue to be discussed.

In the theme of "Globalization," "How does your country participate in an international society" was the main concern of the discussions. The very interesting result was that although Japanese students thought of Japan as an advanced country, many of us felt that it does not contribute enough to solve poverty in African countries. However, after seeing the data on how much money Japan has been spending on developing countries, South African students thought Japan did do enough.

### **GCC2004, Sweden**

In Sweden, the themes discussed were "The Environment - Rain and Food," "The Origins of Values - Brave New World" and "Values and Citizenship-Equality." In the theme of "The Environment - Rain and Food", one South African student said

that during the conference she was not sure if she could take a shower at host family places because she said that she never took a shower at home in South Africa, (she is used to washing herself in a bowl of water). I was very moved by what she said in front of the audience. It was one of the moments I have often felt at a GCC, listening to a person talk about how global issues relate to him or herself and realizing that these issues need to be solved immediately.

In the theme of "The Origins of Values - Brave New World," "Is it possible to live without money?" was mainly discussed. It may seem obvious that in today's society it is almost impossible to live without money. However I find it very important that young students seriously discussed and imagined a world without money. Some students from developing countries even argued that doctors today want money rather than to save someone's life, while some students from developed countries said doctors became doctors to save lives not for money. The discussions went further but did not seem to have certain conclusion. However, I do not think it is always necessary to have conclusions. What is important is to listen to someone carefully and try to understand even when she or he argues something totally different from you. This was actually the attitude to be seen through all the discussions of the GCC.

In the theme of "Citizenship-Equality," sub-topics were "Equal Opportunities and Money," "States, Laws and Environment," "Discrimination," "Equality vs. Diversity" and "Tradition and Prejudice." It could certainly be said that the issues discussed at the GCC will not be solved without cooperation of all humankind. But to cooperate, first of all

we have to be equal. As one South African mentioned, even after apartheid has been abolished, there are still a lot of people who discriminate against so called coloured people. In addition to this, one Swedish student said that although Swedish government welcomes immigrants, sometimes they are not welcomed by Swedish citizens.

The global issues discussed through the GCC may be too difficult to treat scientifically, especially since the participants of the discussions are students aged 15-18. However the experience of having discussion and coming up with some solutions is more than valuable enough, even without any scientific claims. We came to the conclusion that in order to create an equal society, there must you must have no prejudice of any kind before you actually meet someone with different background, skin colour or whatever. One of the ways to get rid of prejudice can be to let young people communicate with people who are different. For this to happen, there should be more international conferences like the GCC. As one of the participants, I have learned how important it is to actually meet and share ideas with people who feel that they have been discriminated against or who are looking for the origin of discrimination. Communication surely is the key to create equal societies, therefore there should be more opportunities provided for students to participate in these kinds of programs.

#### **About the writer**

Masayasu SAKAGUCHI is a current student at the University of Tsukuba. His major is pedagogy. His main focus is human rights education.

## ***Education For All by 2015: The Situation in Nepal***

Koko Kato, UNICEF Intern in Nepal  
Tim Murphey, Dokkyo University



**Email to Tim Murphey, August 25, 2007:**

*Dear Tim,*

*I am back to Kathmandu. Please enjoy the million dollar smiles of some*

*kids I met in a rural school.*

*The teacher/student ratio is 1:62! So now you see how Nepali rural schools have a serious problem. This field-visit was for monitoring UNICEF's girls' education districts. This time I visited two districts, and next month I will visit another two. This visit was really a good experience for me to see the real*

*situation of education in Nepal. I could not have known it if I was sitting in a office every day in Kathmandu.*

*I visited poor communities in southern areas. These areas are called "Terai" and they are important areas because of the border with India. However, these areas have more problems with education than*

*Kathmandu and "poverty" is the main cause of that. Some say, "India takes the good part of trade but ignores the brand, Made in Nepal." Moreover this time, floods are seriously damaging these areas.*

*In terms of education, most of the communities have similar problems; lack of physical facilities and (female) teachers. As you may have already heard, the world is working for EFA (Education For All) and hopes to achieve universal education for all at the primary level by 2015 under*

*the UN treaty. Nepal also signed this treaty, so the government is making hard efforts to achieve these aims. The effort is becoming fruitful and the enrolment rate of students is increasing. But the speed of the increase of students is too fast to meet the demand for the number of classrooms and teachers.*

**"I envision a community center something like the modern SALCs ... Students would be tested and deemed knowledgeable enough in an area and then act as a peer tutor for others."**

*The education budget of the government has remained the same. We cannot "produce" a teacher instantly. Some schools have already started the system of volunteer teachers from their communities, but in terms of quality of education, this cannot be said as a panacea for the problem.*



*Tim, I think this is a real problem in Nepal. The international and national levels demand "EFA" and are happy about the increase of students. But at the district level, in the field, I am not sure children are getting a good quality education. People might say that poor children at least can go to school. I know this is of course good. But for their "real" betterment in the future, I think many things still have to be done. And also, I know this is not such an easy task. The government, international agencies, schools, community, and such stakeholders need to use their heads and reach a breakthrough. 2015 is coming fast. The budget is limited, and the demand for teachers increases. Do you have any good ideas?*

*~Koko*

#### **Email from Tim Murphey to Koko Kato:**

*Dear Koko,*

*Thanks for the photo. The kids are adorable! I hope you can send more soon. You are right that if a country just gets all its children to go to one place (called a school) just in order to satisfy the call for "Education for All", without supplying teachers and classrooms and some structure, then it could be more harmful than helpful. I can imagine parents objecting because the children might be helping out with earning money at home, and they probably just waste their time in school if there are 100 kids to one teacher.*

*I would dare to say that many of us in developed countries did not like going to school, and some have proposed better ways to go about educating without schools (see Illich's books and the home-schooling literature for examples). Perhaps developing countries do not have to go through the same processes to learn that literacy and numeracy can be learned in community centers rich in books and peer tutoring, without forcing them into listening to boring teachers lecture.*

#### **Community Centers and SALCs**

*This brings me to the point of curriculum. I can imagine in poverty areas that useful and practical skills would be the ones most necessary and wanted: health care, sanitation information, literacy and numeracy for eventually running small businesses and prospering. Again I would propose the community center approach of*

*cascading information and knowledge down through the people who come to the community center. I imagine a Community SALC in which for every two or three people I help, I am allowed one free session of tutoring from someone higher than me or at my level. This is kind of built on the Pass it Forward idea. This would reduce the need of hired teachers considerably but there still could be some classes when needed. It would be based on Near Peer Role-Modeling which might be a healthier way to go about education anyway.*

### ***Sister Communities***

*One way to finance the Community SALCs and the few people trained to work there might be to form Sister Communities in the developed countries. NGO's found out a long time ago, that if you put a face to the donation and personalize it, it seems to mean more. I supported four children in Thailand for several years and the organization always sent me their pictures and letters. For a small town in Japan to send learning material, money, and occasionally teachers to a set community and even bring some of them to Japan would help finance the operation somewhat. Or perhaps we could organize students at a university to adopt a community center SALC and visit on their holidays and do volunteer work at it.*

*Finally, I would like the measure for EFA to be NOT how many kids are in school, but how many come voluntarily to the Community SALC*

*(say five hours a week) and how many are becoming literate. Presence in school does not mean learning.*

*Let's put all this in Languaging! and see what our readers say and what ideas they have.*

*~Tim*



### **About the writers**

Koko Kato has been doing an internship in Nepal with UNICEF and NGO for the five months. She will be going to the University of London in January to finish her MA studies in Education and International Development. Last year she studied for a year at IDEAS (Institute of Developing Economies Advanced School) and before that was employed as a staff member at Dokkyo University.

Tim Murphey is a language teacher and researcher at Dokkyo University and beyond. He is interested in how the wisdom of crowds might be utilized to empower the world's disenfranchised and impoverished.

### **Readers!**

If you have any ideas or experience in helping support education in poverty stricken areas of the world, we would love to hear about it. Send us your ideas or post your thoughts on *Languaging!*'s online discussion board.



## ***Get Involved! How to Start Volunteering Student Volunteering Opportunities (SVOs)***

Naoki Sekimoto, Dokkyo University

*When you think of volunteering, you may think of going abroad to help people who suffer from poverty or illness or to cooperate with international people to save the environment. Other people may stay in their own country to communicate with children, elderly people, people who suffer from illness, people from foreign countries, etc. They might also donate through the internet or on their own to an organization which actively works for volunteering around the world. Just making people around you happy may also be an unofficial volunteer activity!*

*During summer vacation, 2007, my classmate, Ryoko Fukuma, and I received 18 reports from our teacher on 'Student Volunteering Opportunities' written by his seminar students the previous year. We formatted the reports, confirmed the links, and made booklets to share with you. The booklet is published for everyone, especially students who just started searching for volunteering possibilities. Just looking at this booklet might offer you the chance to give back to the world in your daily life.*

*Below we provide a short introduction and some tips about volunteering that are also included in the booklet:*

### ***Introduction to SVOs***

Many students at our university signed a petition a few years ago asking for the university to set up a volunteer center. The job of the center was to be a resource center for students looking to volunteer, a place they could read about various NGOs and other organizations and gather information. It would be a place to help students make better decisions about how they could give back to the world some of the wonder that they have received. While the center has not yet been organized (although we hope our administrators are still planning it), we thought it would be good to give it a push with a little publication of our own.

In 2006, 18 students introduced a variety of volunteering opportunities to their classmates in Dr. Murphey's seminar. We include our contributions here in three parts, Local SVOs, National SVOs, and International SVOs. At the very front, we preface this list with some excellent advice about volunteering from Kevin Johnson, the *National Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator* for American Mensa, Ltd. We highly advise you to read Kevin's list, especially when you are considering volunteering for the first time. We hope this booklet will be helpful and encourage you to find volunteering opportunities. Please do

let us know your recommendations for further organizations or information that you think would be valuable. We would like to update the SVO yearly if possible. Please send comments and

information to The Editors:

Naoki: g4121244@dokkyo.ac.jp

Ryoko: g4128362@dokkyo.ac.jp

Tim: mits@dokkyo.ac.jp

## ***So You Want to Be A Volunteer?***

### **Seven Useful Principles of Volunteering**

When you want to volunteer and help improve the world, there are several principles that can guide you in your decision making. Kevin Johnson, the National Gifted and Talented Program Coordinator for American Mensa, Ltd., listed his “First Principles of Volunteering” in the *Mensa Bulletin*, Jan. 2003. Below are his seven principles, slightly edited:

**1. Do what you want to do**

The choice to volunteer should be decided not by duty, but by desire. If you find yourself thinking that you “should” volunteer to do this or that, think again. When your volunteering comes straight from the heart, you will feel a pleasant sense of satisfaction that makes it easy for you to look forward to the day when you may give again.

**2. Do what you are good at or what you want to learn**

When, with the little time that we have to give, we find ourselves working on tasks that our aptitudes are not suited for, it can become a recipe for frustration.

**3. Never try to rescue anyone**

If anyone tells you that only you could do the job right, or if you find yourself telling yourself that, you’d better not listen. Saying “yes” to something that you do not want to do, for any reason, will generally lead to disappointment on both sides.

**4. Volunteer strategically**

If at all possible, try to find those projects that entail the least effort and the greatest potential benefit. There is a limit to how hard we can work as volunteers. Work smarter, not harder.

**5. Start small and increase slowly**

The best way to volunteer is to start very small and increase the amount of volunteering we do by increments.

**6. Handing on the torch**

If you’ve followed all of these principles, you should be able to sustain your volunteerism for a long time. Even so, it may come time for you to hand off your volunteer efforts to someone else. Make sure you plan for the time it will take to transition. Knowing you’ve left things in good hands will help to preserve the satisfaction you felt during your time.

**7. Be frank (honest) with others and yourself**

Volunteerism can turn into a monster that we created, eating up our time and energy, and sometimes not even giving us the satisfaction of knowing we’ve made a difference. What do we do when we find ourselves in trouble with our own good intentions? Direct, frank (honest) communication with those who have come to rely on us is the first step. Based on their feedback, you may be able to come to a new agreement, more scaled down, that meets your needs.

From: Johnson, Kevin, (Jan. 2003) First Principles of Volunteering, *THE SIKH TIMES – Noteworthy News and Analysis from Around the World* (Mensa Bulletin): <http://www.sikh-times.com/volunteering.html> (accessed 2007/08/25)

Researched by Naoki Sekimoto

### **About the writer**

Naoki Sekimoto is a 4<sup>th</sup> year student, entering graduate school next year. He volunteered for threes a few summers ago in Australia with CVA (Conservation Volunteer Australia) to plant trees.

※ A copy of the SVO booklet in pdf format can be downloaded at <http://www.geocities.com/languaging/L10/SVObooklet>

Photocopiable Discussion Page

# Learning English Feels So Good!

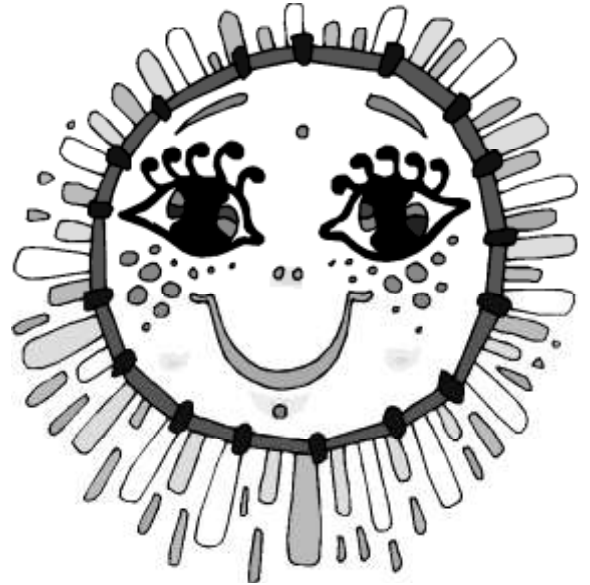
25 things that can make you feel good about learning English

## Step One

Go slowly. Think about these “English Learning Feel Goods” one at a time BEFORE going on to the next one. Rate each one on a scale of “1 (so-so) to 10 (Wowza!)” Then compare them with a friend.

### *I feel good! ...*

1. ... talking to my friends in English
2. ... making new friends in English
3. ... teaching English to my friends
4. ... helping people in English
5. ... writing notes to friends in English
6. ... feeling my English improve
7. ... when someone compliments my English
8. ... finally understanding grammar through using it instead of studying it
9. ... listening to music in English and understanding the lyrics to a song
10. ... singing English songs
11. ... reading books in English and talking about them with friends
12. ... watching and understanding English movies without subtitles
13. ... chatting in English online
14. ... understanding jokes in English
15. ... learning about other cultures through English
16. ... remembering English idioms and proverbs and being able to use them
17. ... feeling brave enough to speak in front of groups of people in English
18. ... thinking in English even when I am alone
19. ... using English with my friends when we don't want other people to understand us
20. ... secretly listening to someone having an English conversation at a café or restaurant
21. ... when someone from another country understands my English
22. ... and I understand them!
23. ... knowing that I can speak another language and use it to communicate with all kinds of people from all over the world
24. ... dreaming in English
25. ... saying “I love you” in English



## Step Two

What makes you feel good about learning English?

Make your own list and share it with a friend.

(“English Learning Feel Goods” compiled by Ana Maria Barcelos and her students in Brazil, along with Tim Murphey and Christopher Carpenter, inspired by Marc Helgesen’s list of “Feel Goods and Natural Highs.” Marc’s list can be found in his “Happiness Journal,” available online at [http://www.longmankorea.com/admin/lecture/after\\_data/txt/Handout\\_for\\_Marc\\_Helgesen.pdf](http://www.longmankorea.com/admin/lecture/after_data/txt/Handout_for_Marc_Helgesen.pdf))

# The Efficiency Column

## **Teacher Bewildered by Treatment of University Admin Staff**

A foreign teacher who wishes to remain anonymous recently told *Languaging!* that he was dumbfounded by the way administrative staff are treated at Dokkyo University. "These are professionals who work very hard," said the teacher, "And they become quite expert in their departments. I've worked in Japan for years and I've not met staff of the same caliber at any other university." So, what's the problem? *Languaging!* asked. They all look happy to us. "The problem is that despite their loyalty to the university and its students, these people seem to have little or no say in their professional paths. Even the best in a department can suddenly be transferred to a completely new office with no warning. The administrative executives and faculty treat staff as interchangeable action figures with no respect for their wishes or specializations. I've seen people who worked in a department for 15 years, doing very valuable work, suddenly notified that they would be moving to a completely different department within weeks to a position with no relation to their obvious skills. From Kyoumuka to Human Resources, from Career Center to secretarial desks, people seem to be shuffled around willy-nilly like so many cards in a deck. I just don't understand it. Why don't they organize and resist such absurd, dictatorial measures?" *Languaging!* had no answers for this confused lecturer. Do you?

## **Academic Management Also Questioned**

As Japan has become a more competitive job market for teachers, some in faculty positions may feel that teachers too are becoming dispensable and interchangeable. Another anonymous lecturer had this to say about the situation:

"This is not the first time I've worked in an employer-biased labor market. I toiled in the service industry for 15 years. I worked in just about every conceivable position in the restaurant and bar business and learned a few things about management along the way.

Specifically, the best workers will go to where they are respected and treated as professionals, even if the money is not quite as high. This is true even among the band of thieves known as "waitrons." The best restaurants I worked in provided continual learning opportunities, had regular and meaningful open dialogue with employees, and consulted them whenever possible about decisions concerning their livelihoods. For example, I used to work at a fine Italian restaurant. Whenever the chef would create a new special, he would prepare it in front of the staff, explain all of the ingredients in it, let everyone taste it and get their feedback (even dishwashers and busboys). He would have the experienced waiters recommend the appropriate starters and wine accompaniments. Interested staff might arrive to work early so that they could really see how things were prepared. And if the staff liked a special, you can guarantee it got sold.

"Universities in Japan might take some lessons from the service industry. For example, when teachers who have been teaching the same classes for 9, 10, 15 years suddenly find a new curriculum shoved down their throats without having even been consulted for their professional input, it simultaneously gives the burden of adjusting to new materials and creates a distanced, hierarchical and confrontational relationship between the curriculum designers (i.e. faculty) and 80% of its executors (i.e. adjunct teachers). When it turns out that the materials aren't even appropriate for the learners, the situation can become caustic and volatile. Teachers leave. New, less experienced, more pliable teachers are hired to replace them. But is this really in the best interest of the university or the students, the people we are supposedly serving?"

**Do you have suggestions for improving the way we work, teach or learn? Do you just like to rant? Write for The Efficiency Column!**

Disclaimer: Each author's content and ranting is her or his own and not necessarily that of the newsletter.