Effects of different learning environments on various types of English skills and knowledge in Japanese students: Mixed-method approaches

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Abstract
This symposium features the effects of different learning environments on various skills and knowledge types in L2 English. All three studies employed mixed-method designs to investigate multiple data sources drawn from Japanese university students. The targeted learning experiences were study-abroad, immersion, and international volunteering, which have attracted increasing attention due to the growing importance of English for global communication.

Changing relationships among L2 writing strategies, L2 proficiency, and L2 writing ability: A dynamic systems approach

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Abstract
This study examines the effects of initial and subsequent motivational differences on the development of L2 writing strategy use in second language (L2) learners. Using dynamic systems theory (e.g., de Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011) as a framework, I investigated changes in their use of two strategies, Global Planning and Local Planning, while also considering the influence of changes in various cognitive and environmental factors on such strategy use. A total of 37 Japanese university students studying English participated in this study over 3.5 years. The results reveal that: (1) initial differences in the students' motivation had a significant impact on changes in their L2 writing strategy use; (2) the students' L2 writing strategy use was continuously influenced by both cognitive and environmental factors; and (3) the students' developmental trajectories were well captured by a DST perspective at both the group and the individual level.

I. Introduction
In this study I used a dynamic systems theory (DST) perspective (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011) as a framework and examined the effects of second language (L2) initial and subsequent motivational differences among learners on changes in their use of two L2 writing strategies, Global Planning and Local Planning. I also considered the effects of changes in various cognitive and environmental factors on the learners' use of these strategies. A total of 37 Japanese university students studying English participated in this study over 3.5 years. On the basis of results reported in the relevant literature, I asked the following three research questions:

1. How did initial differences across the students in motivational intensity for L2 writing influence changes in their use of two L2 writing strategies (Global planning and Local planning) over 3.5 years?
2. How did the cognitive factors of L2 proficiency and L2 writing ability as well as other environmental factors influence and interact with the students' use of the two L2 writing strategies over the 3.5 years?
3. Does employing both group-level and individual-level analyses help us to better understand these changes from a DST perspective?

II. Methods

A. Participants
A total of 37 Japanese university students participated in this study. They were divided into four groups: the At-Home (AH) group, who remained in Japan, the Study-Abroad SA-1.5-2 Group, who spent 1.5 to 2 months abroad, and the SA-4 Group, who spent four months abroad, and the SA-8-11 Group, who spent months abroad. The groups were divided in such a way because the results of Sasaki (2011) reveal that these differences reflected their initial and subsequent motivational intensity for L2 writing. Except for such differences, their L2 proficiency, L2 writing ability and strategy use, and educational backgrounds were

similar when the study started in their first year in university.

B. Data

I collected the following data at four different points: in the first months of the participants' first year, and in the third month of their second, third, and fourth year:

- Scores on the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT);
- Scores given to argumentative compositions by two raters using Jacobs et al.'s (1981) English Composition Profile;
- Stimulated recall protocols of writing processes, which were coded by raters into 21 different L2 writing strategies.

In addition to these quantitative data, I also interviewed the students at the end of their four L2 writing session and at the end of the 3.5 year observation period to ask about their L2 learning experiences and motivation.

III. Results

A. L2 Proficiency and L2 Writing Ability as the Background Variables

In the first year, there was little difference across the four groups. However, the SA-4 and SA-8-11 groups improved to a significantly greater extent than the other two groups in terms of L2 proficiency and writing ability. In terms of development over the 3.5 years, all three SA groups significantly improved both their L2 proficiency and L2 writing ability whereas the AH group did not improve either.

B. Global Planning

Among the four groups, the AH group learned to use global planning least, the SA-1.5-2 group little, the SA-4 group rather more, and the SA-8-11 group the most, and the differences were statistically significant (see Figure 1). This suggests that the students' initial motivational differences had a significant impact on their subsequent use of this strategy. However, at the individual level, the use of this strategy is not a simple story of gradual increase. The students started to use it or stopped using it for various reasons including the effects of non-L2 related environments such as their part-time working experiences. And yet, the results of the multiple regression analyses indicate that the use of this strategy was significantly related to improvements in composition scores.
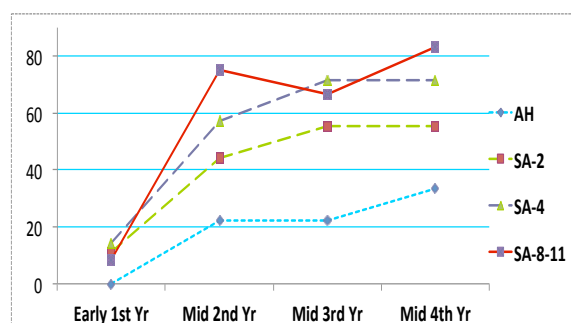

Figure 1. Changes in the ratio of those who used Global Planning

C. Local-Planning

Unlike for global planning, there were no differences in the use of local planning across the four groups over the 3.5 years. The initial motivational differences do not seem to have impacted the use of this strategy (see Figure 2). However, a closer look at the participants' reasons for using this strategy revealed that some students' rationale changed from "thinking what to write next" to trying to make the local parts cohere with the global plan they had by then learned to make. This change was reported most often by the SA-4 and SA-8-11 groups, less often by the SA-1.5-2, and least often by the AH group. Such differences across the four groups were reflected in the results of the regression analyses, which showed that the students' use of this strategy started to have a significantly positive relationship with L2 writing ability in their fourth year but not in their first year.
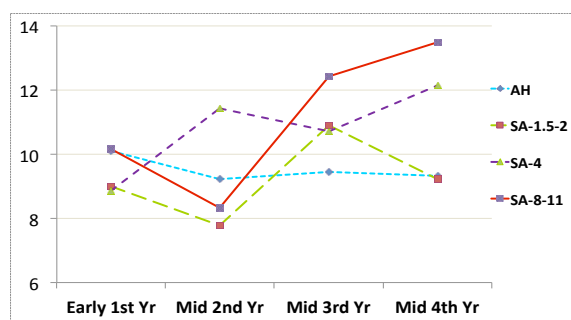

Figure 2. Changes in the Frequencies of Use of Local Planning

III. Conclusion

The results of the present study indicate that initial differences in the students' motivational intensity had a significant impact on the subsequent development in their L2 writing strategy use. Although the students' developmental trajectories were not linear, the initial motivational differences continued to influence their subsequent use of the two strategies, which further interacted with other cognitive and environmental factors (e.g., some of the SA students became more motivated to write better as a result of their overseas stay). The results also demonstrate that a DST perspective can be usefully applied to L2 learners' development at both the group

and the individual level.

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Development of Pragmatic Competence in an English-Medium Context

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Abstract

This presentation reports on a study that examined the development of pragmatic competence among Japanese students in an English-medium university. Forty-eight students completed a test assessing their ability to produce two speech acts (requests and disagreements) in formal and informal situations. The test was administered three times over one year to trace change. In addition, qualitative data were collected from a subset of 12 participants through interviews, observations, and journals. Results showed that students' ability to produce formal speech acts did not develop due to their lack of attention to sociocultural language use. Because classroom instructors encouraged direct mode of communication, putting politeness considerations behind, students seemed to have developed a wrong assessment of target form-function-context mappings that constrained their progress with formal speech acts.

I. Introduction
Previous research investigated L2 learners' linguistic development in a variety of contexts, including study abroad, immersion, sojourn and formal classroom (Collentin & Freed, 2004; DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Swain & Johnson, 1997). In pragmatics, studies mainly focused on study abroad and immersion as environments where acquisition of sociocultural language use takes place. These studies were based on the assumption that target community provides beneficial opportunities to observe norms of politeness and formality, as well as opportunities to practice them in authentic interaction. However, despite this commonly-held assumption, research showed that exposure to target language does not always guarantee pragmatic development. Effects of study abroad and immersion vary across sociolinguistics targets and individuals. Some targets are learned quickly as a result of exposure, while others take time to internalize. Individuals' experience, investment, intensity of interaction, and availability of feedback affect the degree of gain (Barron, 2002; Kinginger, 2008; Taguchi, 2008). This study adds to the literature by presenting a dynamic analysis of context, individuals, and pragmatic change in immersion. Using a mixed-method approach, this study examines development of pragmatic competence and academic socialization among Japanese students in an English-medium university.

II. Methodology

A. Research site and participants
Participants were 48 first-year Japanese students in an English-medium school where all classes are taught in English, 50% of instructors are foreign nationals, and international students occupy 10-15% of the population.

B. Instrument and data
Participants completed an oral discourse completion test. They read situational descriptions and produced two speech acts: making a request and expressing an opinion. Speech acts had two situation types: formal and informal. Formal speech acts involved a high-degree of imposition and was addressed to a person with more power (e.g., expressing concerns to a teacher about class). Informal speech acts involved a low-degree of imposition and was produced to a person in an equal relationship (e.g., passing a frank opinion to a friend about clothes). Speech acts were evaluated for appropriateness on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent) by two native English speakers (interrater reliability, r=.93). This study also collected qualitative data from interviews with teachers and students, class observations, and journals.

III. Results
Figure 1 displays changes in appropriateness scores. Students demonstrated a strong gain with informal speech acts, nearing the perfect score of 5.0 at Time 3. Repeated measures ANOVA showed that the gain was statistically significant, F=30.85, p<.001. However, there was no significant gain with formal speech acts, F=3.58, p=.036.
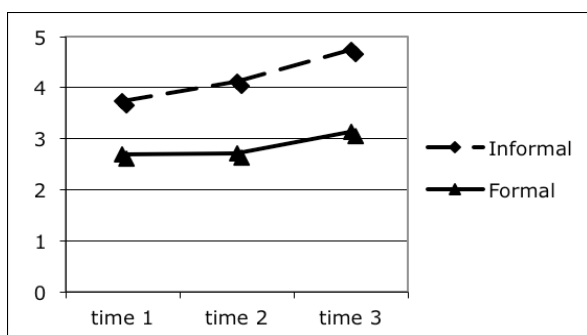
Figure 1. Appropriateness score, informal and formal speech acts

Interviews and observations revealed possible reasons for students' limited progress with formal speech acts. It was found that students did not use polite language with teachers nor received corrective feedback on their inappropriate language. Below I will present one example.

Ippei was one of the students who made no progress with formal speech acts. His score remained the same from Time 1 to Time 2, and dropped by one point at Time 3. I witnessed him performing a similar speech act to his class instructors several times, often very directly. His teacher, Brian, told me that Ippei complained about his class in journal. Ippei wrote:

> I think you have some points at which you must improve. First, I don't like your test. I don't like a listening test. Why did you do listening? I think it was good to do speaking interview, so you should only do a speaking interview as a test.

Ippei told me that he didn't think the message was particularly rude. I asked him if he would change anything in the text. He talked about grammar but no mention on politeness, suggesting his incorrect assessments of the situation and lack of knowledge of proper forms to use. Brian's interaction style seemed to have influenced Ippei's wrong assessment of the context and form. Through interviews, it became clear that Brian didn't mind students' frankness. In fact, he was constantly encouraging students to be direct and forthcoming, and he never corrected students' inappropriate language use. See his comment:

> (I didn't get offended by Ippei), because I want to get feedback from students. He made his point clearly, and he backed it up. . . . I felt that in his own way he was trying to improve my teaching. . . . He didn't go behind my back and tell everybody that he hated my class. He came directly to me and made his point. I was proud of him.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, Ippei seemed lacking sensitivity to the sociocultural dimension of language use, which gave him little basis for pragmatic development. His experience in the environment seemed to have led to this lack of sensitivity. Teachers were often so keen on getting students' feedback that they didn't care much about the manner in which the feedback was delivered. They responded to the content of the message but not to the language, either neglecting to correct students' misuse of pragmalinguistic forms or feeling no need to correct it. In this regard, teachers and students were on the same page: if students prioritized direct communication of meaning over manner of communication, teachers did too. These findings demonstrate an intricate interaction among institutional goals, teachers' and students' expectations, and patterns of social interaction that led to this skewed trajectory of pragmatic development.

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Development of Intercultural Competence through Participating in International Volunteering

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Abstract

This presentation reports on how Japanese students develop intercultural skills through participating in international volunteer work using English. A quantitative investigation demonstrates that intercultural contact enhanced the students' willingness to communicate, interest in international affairs, social skills, and self efficacy while reducing ethnocentrism. A second study reveals ethnographically the process through which participants struggle to understand each other in English while getting the job done and how L2 competence, work knowledge, and intercultural experience affect the interaction and its outcome.

I. Introduction: International volunteer projects

I report on two studies that investigated how Japanese students develop intercultural competence through participating in international volunteering using English. The international volunteer work was organized by a nonprofit organization (NPO) that offers multicultural youth groups a chance to experience collaborative work in various parts of the world. Each year, this NPO sends about 600 young Japanese people to work on projects such as building roads, repairing houses, or taking care of children in a nursery home. Of these 600, 70% are female. In each project, the official languages used by the participants are English and the local language of the country where the project takes place.

II. Quantitative investigation

The first study investigates the effects of international volunteer work experiences on young people's willingness to communicate, interest in international affairs, social skills, self efficacy, and ethnocentrism, using a quasi-experimental procedure. The participants in the study included 286 Japanese university students who joined international volunteer projects and 116 who did not. Nearly half of the participants had been overseas previously, mostly for home stays. Preliminary analyses revealed that the participants in the projects scored significantly higher than non-participants on most of the variables studied and lower on ethnocentrism even before they participated in the projects. The results of an ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference between participants and non-participants after controlling for preexisting differences in all of the variables studied. The results also show that both participants and non-participants who had previous intercultural experience scored higher than those who never had such experiences on most of the variables and lower on ethnocentrism. The scores in pretests and posttests for two of the variables, willingness to communicate and ethnocentrism, are graphically represented in Figures 1 and 2. The four lines in each of the figure represent participants with previous intercultural experience, participants without such experience, non-participants with intercultural experience, and non-participants with no such experience. Similar results were obtained with international interest, openness (ethno-relative attitudes), social skills, and self-efficacy (for a detailed discussion, see Yashima, 2010). These results demonstrate that although those who decided to join a project had a high level of intercultural competence before they participated in the project, the volunteer work experience developed this competency further. Given the differences between those with and those without previous intercultural contact, we can conclude that continued intercultural contact makes people develop as intercultural communicators, widening the gap with those who have not

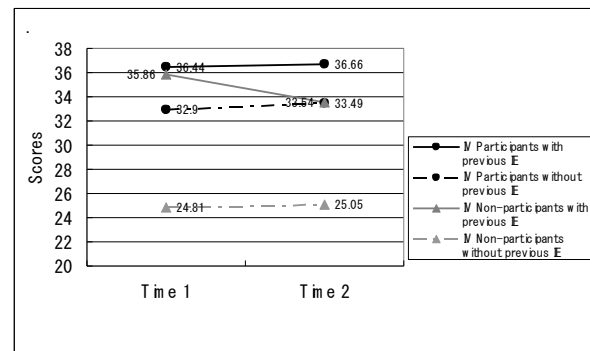participated in such activities.

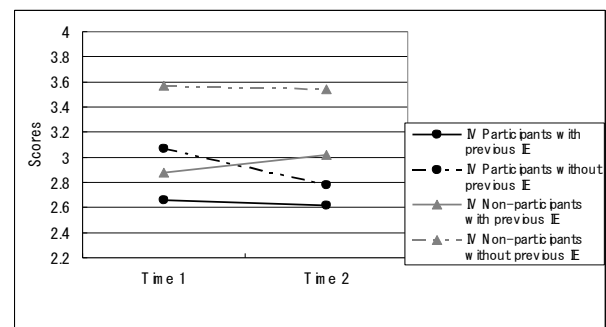**Figure 1: Changes in WTC through study abroad (Yashima, 2009)**

Figure 2: Changes in ethnocentric tendency (Yashima, 2010)

III. Qualitative inquiry

In the hope of understanding the process of intercultural learning through participating in international collaboration, a second ethnographic study was conducted (as partly reported in Deguchi & Yashima, 2009). In this study, the first author made a participatory observation of a volunteer project conducted in Japan over ten days. In the project studied, participants' responsibilities included taking care of children who joined summer camps offered by an organization called Kid's Village. The official languages used in this project were English and Japanese. The participants in the project (and therefore in the study) were a Japanese student who was selected to be the leader, two students from Korea, a Russian student, a member of the staff of Kid's Village, and the first author of the study. All but one (one of the Korean students) were female.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the process of negotiation aiming to achieve mutual understanding among participants. During the first two days, there was an unvoiced conflict between Japanese and non-Japanese participants. Japanese participants felt that the international participants were not cooperative while the international students

looked somewhat frustrated. A meeting then took place. A recorded segment of conversation from the meeting, in which participants discussed the problems they faced in taking care of the children, was analyzed. Although the procedure employed for analysis was essentially discourse analysis, attention was also paid to the fact that the participants were not equal in terms of L2 competence, work knowledge, and intercultural skills. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of "cultural capital" was employed to account for the differential capital that each learner brought to the conversational floor, where the six participants used English, which was an L2 for everyone, while occasionally switching to Japanese. It is not only what participants say and in which language they say it but the weight of each person's capital that differentially creates their "right to speak" and how much what they say will be listened to and respected. In particular, we focused on the struggle of Aki, the 20-year-old Japanese leader, to get her meaning across on the basis of her relatively small capital, that is, her limited English competency and lack of work knowledge and experience. Aki was not capable of explaining what was expected of the participants and she lacked the pragmatic competence that would have enabled her to use directives appropriately. This was at the root of the frustration expressed by the overseas participants. However, when the conversation was about to break down, thanks to interventions by the first author, it took a positive turn. Participants started disclosing their feelings honestly. Aki summoned up courage to explain her views in English and Japanese with the help of the first author, who helped with the translation, and of the experienced staff member, who explained the objective of the project. Toward the end of the segment, participants were willing to cooperate with each other to get the job done. The analyses demonstrated how each participant's L2 competence, work knowledge, and experience positioned them differently in the social context, thus creating power differences. Yet we also learned that participants' motivation to understand each other and sharing the mutual goal of getting the job done as well as proactive attitudes toward intercultural contact helped the conversation take a turn for the better. The second study thus demonstrated the dialogic process involved in developing intercultural competence.

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