SiSAL Journal

Studies in Self-Access Learning

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CONTENTS: Volume 3, Number 2, June 2012

Edited by Jo Mynard

Articles

Short papers

Announcements

Upcoming special issues: Call for papers

- **SiSAL Journal Special Issue on Strategy Development in Self-Access** edited by Heath Rose
- **SiSAL Journal Special Issue on Self-Access Writing Support** edited by Rachael Ruegg

Contents Volume 3, Number 2, June 2012

Issue edited by Jo Mynard

Editorial

Jo Mynard, Kanda University of International Studies, Japan

Welcome to the June 2012 issue of SiSAL Journal. This is the ninth issue of the journal and the first one that is *not* a special issue. The editors felt that it was appropriate that having some general issues might attract submissions on emerging interest areas within the field of self-access learning.

The papers in this issue can be grouped roughly into three themes:

- Theme 1: How do students learn best through self-access?
- Theme 2: Self-access resources
- Theme 3: Advising

How do Students Learn Best?

Self-access centres aim to support learners in different ways, through materials, facilities, learner development, advising and other support, and community-building events. Several contributors to this issue take a close look at the ways in which we might best offer this support. **Heath Rose** begins his article with a helpful summary of strategy research. He then describes a study investigating the strategies used by learners of Japanese, with a focus on cognition and self-regulation. He concludes by calling for more research that acknowledges context-specific approaches to strategic learning.

Howard Doyle and Michael Parrish share a summary of some of their research at their institutions in Japan, research which began with the realisation that their students were only aware of limited "ways" to learn English outside of class. In a later stage of the research, the authors found that a closed-item questionnaire served as an awareness-raising tool for students to learn and implement a wider range of effective ways to study.

Leander Hughes, Nathan Krug and Stacey Vye investigate why frequent visitors initially came to their centre in Japan and why they continue to come. Many of us working in the field have noticed the importance of social dimension of self-access learning, but it is useful to see more empirical research supporting these assumptions.

Self-Access Resources

Colleagues working in libraries work hard to ensure that they are addressing students' needs. **Glenna Westwood** was concerned about the needs of students taking foreign language courses within her institution in Canada, and this inspired the research she conducted in Mexico. The author investigated the needs of students taking language courses at the University of Guanajuato and found that students frequently consult resources such as grammar books, course texts and films. The author concludes by sharing her experiences of including such resources within a library collection.

Pauline Moore Hanna describes an approach to helping students to learn how to use phrasal verbs by making use of a computer-based Learning Object (LO). The author describes how the LO may resolve the difficulties that learners have with learning phrasal verbs, with considerations which might be useful for self-access materials developers in other contexts.

Advising

In his article, **Paul Moore** discusses the role of *academic language and learning advising* in Australian universities. The author outlines the practice and explains how it is influenced by political, pedagogical and practical factors. He draws on Carson and Mynard's (2012) description of the role of advising in language learning and explores how the two fields might inform each other.

All of the articles featured in this issue have implications for learning advisors working in self-access contexts. We constantly need to examine the ways in which we help learners to find the best strategies and approaches to self-directed learning. We are also engaged in helping learners find the most appropriate resource. I am grateful to the authors for sharing the insights from their contexts. Their work has certainly made me reflect on my advising practice.

Upcoming Issues of SiSAL Journal

There are still four weeks until the deadline for submissions for the September 2012 issue, which will also be a general issue. Following that, there will be two guest edited special issues. Heath Rose from Trinity College, Dublin will be editing the December 2012 special issue on strategies. Rachael Ruegg from Akita International University in Japan will be guest editing the March 2013 issue on writing. Please take a look at the details online.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the contributors for submitting their work to SiSAL Journal, to the reviewers for their feedback, and to the editorial team once again for their input, support and editing skills. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome new members to the SiSAL Journal editorial team and to thank existing members for their continued support. For a full list of members, please see the website.

Notes on the editor

Jo Mynard is an Associate Professor at Kanda University of International Studies in Japan. She is the Director of the Self-Access Learning Centre, Assistant Director of the English Language Institute and Deputy Director of the Research Institute of Language Studies and Language Education. She holds an Ed.D. in TEFL from the University of Exeter, UK and an M.Phil. in applied linguistics from Trinity College, Dublin. She has taught EFL in Ireland, Spain, England, the UAE and Japan, and has been involved in facilitating self-access learning since 1996. She co-edited three recently published volumes; one on learner autonomy and two on advising in language learning.

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SiSAL Journal Vol. 3, No. 2, June 2012, 137-148

Language learning strategy research: Where do we go from here?

Heath Rose, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Abstract

Language learning strategy (LLS) research has been on the decline since the mid-1990s, when there was a boom in strategy research. This decline is, in part, due to growing criticisms of categorizations of learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2005), the data collection instruments used (Dörnyei, 2005; Woodrow, 2005), and contradictory and questionable results (Hadwin & Winne, 1996). In more recent years some research has been conducted under the umbrella of terms such as strategic learning and self-regulation, which aim to distance themselves from the past problems of LLS research. This article uses a recent study of strategic learning to illustrate how strategy research can be conducted in the current academic environment. The study shows that research frameworks need to be context-specific rather than generalized across languages and learning tasks. The study also illustrates the usefulness of qualitative data collection instruments over previously and widely applied questionnaires.

Keywords: strategic learning, self-regulation, language learning strategies

Introduction

In a recent article in *Applied Linguistics*, I use the analogy of throwing the baby out with the bathwater to discuss the notion of thousands of published research articles on language learning strategies (LLS) over the past 30 years being discarded in the face of self-regulation (Rose, 2012). Indeed, language learning strategy research has faced a barrage of criticism in recent years, much of which is justified. The unfortunate result, however, is a field of research that once garnered much attention in the academic community becoming a field that many new scholars are hesitant to enter. In addition to this, the little research that has occurred in the last ten years tries to separate itself from LLS, by using the term strategic learning, which often includes the notion of self-regulation.

Furthermore, we have also seen a number of models of strategic learning emerge in recent years to take the place that was once occupied by the LLS framework. These include Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt's (2006) model of self-regulation based on Dörnyei's (2005) motivation control taxonomy, Weinstein's (2009) model of strategic learning, and Oxford's (2011) model of Strategic Self-regulation. With so many emerging models it has become difficult for the new researcher to choose an appropriate framework in which to conduct research into strategic learning. Also, the future uncertainties of new models of strategic learning research, coupled with the lack of research conducted within these models, have dissuaded new researchers from entering this area.

A *learning strategy* in language learning has been defined as conscious mental activity that contains a goal or intention, an action to reach this goal, and a learning activity (Cohen, 2007). However, Cohen also notes contention among academics over this definition, in that not all learning strategies necessarily reflect these three factors. *Self-regulation* in language learning refers to the processes the learner uses to exercise control over learning. This term has also caused contention in the field, and some researchers use the term synonymously with *autonomy* and *self-management* (Cohen, 2007). There are obvious connections that link both learning strategies and self-regulation to self-access learning, as they share core notions of independent learning settings, learner-centredness, and the raising of awareness and knowledge necessary for a learner to exercise responsibility for their learning (White, 2008).

This paper uses a recent study of mine into the strategic learning of learners of the Japanese language to show how research in this field can be conducted in the current academic environment. It shows the implications of criticisms of LLS on research projects in terms of constructing research frameworks and data collection instruments. It is a hope the reader will see that we are moving into an exciting era of strategy research, where the researcher and practitioner have the freedom to explore context-specific actions of the learner. They are free to do this without the pressure to generalize findings beyond the context or the need to conform to flawed research frameworks from studies of the past.

Literature review

LLS research has been criticized in a number of key areas: categorization of LLS, the use of strategy inventory questionnaires in LLS research, and an over-generalization of strategy use across all aspects of language learning. These criticisms will be examined briefly.

Even though researchers such as Joan Rubin, O'Malley and Chamot were pioneers in the field of LLS, it is the work of Rebecca Oxford that many associate with the rise of LLS strategy research. It is also her taxonomy of LLS that many researchers associate with strategy research, due to this being the preferred model of the time when it reached its boom in the early 1990s. However, Grenfell and Macaro

(2007) state that even before the boom of research began there was considerable unease at the theoretical underpinnings of language learning strategy research. Indeed, Skehan back in 1989 called for re-theorization in the field due to conflicting methodologies and findings. Ironically, it took 19 years for an academic to launch a full attack of the Oxford taxonomy, when Dörnyei (2005) pointed out fundamental definitional issues with categories. However, Grenfell and Macaro (2007) claim that by the time of Dörnyei's criticism the Oxford taxonomy was an out-dated model, and LLS research had moved on since that time. Nevertheless, even if Oxford's taxonomy was on its way out, Dörnyei helped put the nail in the coffin. One thing is clear—taxonomies of language learning strategies are prone to definitional complications, which have to be addressed in the creation of a research framework in this field.

Second, regarding the use of questionnaires in LLS research, much criticism stems from problems with Oxford's once widely used Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL)—a questionnaire designed to measure strategy use. Critics of the SILL argue that it is not an appropriate measure of strategy use (Dörnyei, 2005; Tseng et al., 2006; Woodrow, 2005). First, it can be argued that the SILL measures quantity of strategy use, rather than quality, which causes inaccuracies. As Tseng et al. (2006) point out, this causes students who use a number of strategies in a meaningless way to appear to be more strategic than students who applied a single strategy to a task in a purposeful and effective manner. This issue was addressed in a previous study, which stated: "Low reported strategy use is not always a sign of ineffective learning. Also reportedly high-frequency use of strategies does not guarantee that the learning is successful" (Yamamori, Isoda, Hiromori, & Oxford, 2003, p. 384). In addition to the SILL's lack of precision in examining the quality in which a strategy is applied, a practice of computing mean scores from the SILL in numerous studies has sparked much criticism. Dörnyei (2005) argues it is not psychometrically justifiable due to the SILL's measure of frequency instead of degree (always, sometimes, never), and its scale items not being in a linear relationship, meaning responses cannot be converted into a numerical form. In a comparison of the SILL with another strategy based questionnaire called the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), Woodrow (2005) found the Likert scale of the SILL to be inappropriate because of contextual influences, such as cultural and educational background. Woodrow's study concluded there is a general lack of reliability in using questionnaires to measure learning strategies, as they are not sample specific, and she calls for more qualitative methods.

Discussion of context leads me to the next area of criticism of LLS research. The goal of very ambitious LLS research in the 1990s was to examine over-arching characteristics of the language learner that could be generalized across all aspects of language learning. A result was use of the same instrument (usually the SILL) in numerous studies, which aimed to draw comparisons of strategic learning regardless of the language learned or the context in which it was learned. The result of which were numerous conflicting studies, of which very few met rigorous research criteria (Hadwin & Winne, 1996). There were also a number of studies that, unsurprisingly, found LLS choice to be highly individualistic. Years later, Woodrow's (2005) critique of language learning strategy taxonomies and research instruments emphasizes the need for sample-specific data collection techniques, and "a more situated approach utilizing in-depth qualitative methods" (p. 90). In a recent research project into the application of strategies in context, it was concluded that the "individual and situational context in which a learner operates is complex" (Takeuchi, Griffiths, & Coyle, 2007, p.92), thus supporting Woodrow's claims.

The Study

The study on which this paper is based will be outlined briefly, but it is important to note that this paper examines the theoretical implications of the study, rather than the results of the specific research questions. The overall research project examined the strategic learning of kanji (Japanese written characters), in terms of cognition and self-regulation. One of the secondary aims of the study, however, was to examine the appropriateness of self-regulation in a framework of strategic learning, as well as to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a number of data collection methods used. It is the findings of this aspect of the study that is reported in this article.

The study examined a group of 12 participants, who were learning the Japanese language at a university in the Tokyo area of Japan. The 12 participants were purposively sampled so that they represented a wide range of proficiency and assumed levels of self-regulation and cognitive learning strategy use. In terms of strategic learning the study aimed to investigate not only "good" advanced learners and "poor" beginner learners, but also "poor" advanced learners and "good" beginner learners. Kanji learning in this environment was largely self-directed, with lists of kanji given to students on a regular basis with little instruction on how to study them.

The primary data collection instruments were bi-weekly interviews held over the course of an academic year, where participants discussed their kanji learning in relation to studying for bi-weekly kanji tests. These interviews included not only questions regarding the strategies used, but also their regulation of the kanji-learning task.

A stimulated recall task was embedded within the interview structure. Students had to retake that week's kanji test, voicing to the researcher the strategies they had used to memorize the kanji and also the strategies they were using to recall them.

A questionnaire on kanji strategy use was adapted from a study by Bourke (1996), who created a strategy inventory of kanji learning. This was adapted to incorporate findings of research in this field since then, and to overcome the issue of the non-linear Likert scale of previous questionnaires such as the SILL. A second questionnaire was also added that measured the self-regulatory capacity for kanji learning (SRCKan), adapted from Tseng et al.'s (2006) SRCVoc for English vocabulary learning.

Discussion of Results

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the appropriateness, including strengths and limitations, of a research framework that incorporates notions of cognitive and memory strategies with notions of self-regulation and motivation control. The implications of these findings will be discussed in a way they will be of use to a researcher wanting to conduct research in the field of strategic learning. This section, therefore, will first discuss the appropriateness of the framework, followed by a discussion of the appropriateness of the data collection instruments, before finally examining the appropriateness of a sample-specific qualitative approach compared to a large-scale quantitative one.

The benefits of a context-specific research framework

In constructing a research framework, the study created its own framework based on literature on self-regulation and kanji learning strategies at the time, rather than using a generic framework that would not allow the context specificity that strategy research requires. As figure 1 illustrates, the framework looked at kanji learning from a cognitive and behavioral perspective. Cognitive strategies were adapted from Bourke's (1996) inventory of kanji learning strategies, with some major changes to reflect ongoing research in the area of kanji cognition. Concepts on memory strategies and recall from the field of cognitive psychology were incorporated to add a new dimension to discuss kanji cognition. Non-cognitive strategies in Bourke's original inventory were discarded, as a pilot study had revealed that the newer framework of self-regulation was more than adequate to cover the actions of how students regulated their learning in the kanji-learning task. Accordingly, the study also incorporated the notion of self-regulation from educational psychology, which was encased in Dörnyei's (2005) motivation control taxonomy—a recommendation of Tseng et al. (2006). As literature on self-regulation in second language learning was scarce, much terminology from non-language related self-regulation was drawn upon in the discussion of the findings. This was particularly useful when discussing the concepts of goal setting, and the control of emotion and procrastination.

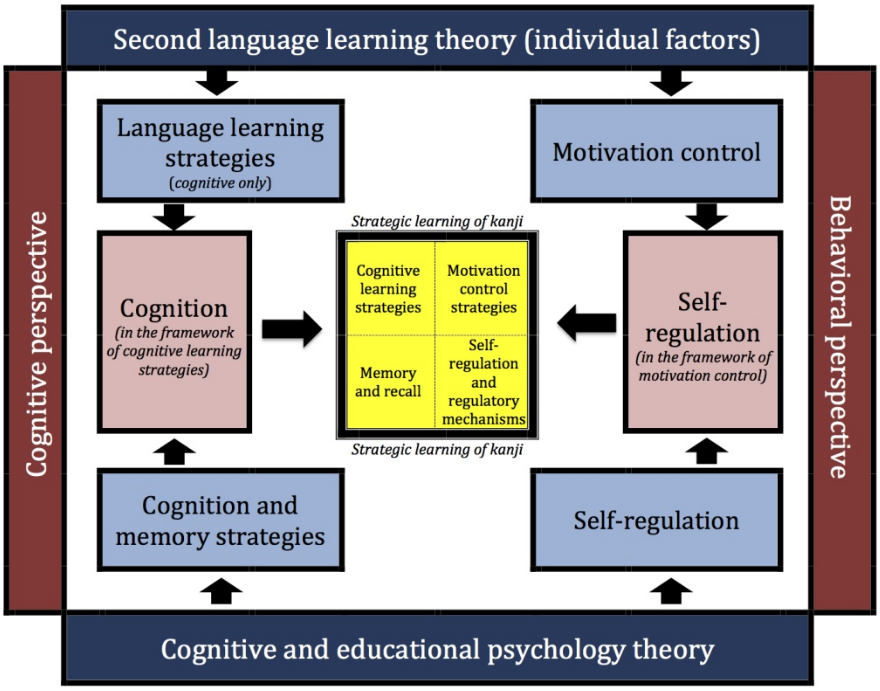

Figure 1. The research framework of the study.

The study found the framework to be very useful in painting a detailed picture of the strategic learning of kanji in this context, which included facets of learning strategies, motivation control, self-regulation and memory and recall. Even though the study found categorical issues with the motivation control framework (Rose, 2012), overall it was found that the addition of self-regulation within the framework gave the researcher insight into the struggles of the kanji learner that would have gone unnoticed had a more traditional framework been applied. Self-regulation also gave the researcher the language to categorize and compare the problems faced by the kanji learner, with problems faced by people in a whole array of situations covered by the umbrella of self-regulation research.

Thus, it is clear that self-regulation adds a new twist on traditional frameworks that examine strategic learning. Simply put, self-regulation cannot be ignored in a research framework that examines strategic learning. However, it does not necessarily need to be encased in the taxonomy of motivation control, due to possible categorical issues (Rose, 2012). Instead, categories can emerge from data in order to develop a taxonomy, which is appropriate to the language-learning context. For example, a framework that examines self-regulation and LLS in self-access learning might look quite different from the one provided above, but may still include elements of cognitive strategies (mental processes) and self-regulation (the process of controlling one's learning).

Data collection instruments—the need for more than questionnaires

The current study explored the concept of strategic learning both quantitatively in the form of a questionnaire and qualitatively in the form of semi-structured interviews and stimulated recall sessions. The results indicate that the qualitative data collection instruments provided a richer picture of strategic learning than the quantitative instruments.

According to Tseng et al. (2006), "researchers need to apply other, more qualitative methodologies (such as stimulated recall and structured observation) to achieve a fuller understanding of the whole picture" (p. 98) of self-regulation. In Woodrow's (2005) critique of language learning strategy taxonomies and research instruments, she emphasizes the need for sample-specific data collection techniques.

Benefits provided to the study by qualitative methods were many. For example, statements of commitment control by students on questionnaires alone were meaningless when compared from case to case, as the type and nature of commitments differed for each student. Without an understanding of these commitments through qualitative data collection, the questionnaire data alone was an unreliable measure. Similarly, perceptions of satiation and emotion control in the kanji-learning task were context specific and also not accounted for in a questionnaire. One participant, for example, whose commitment to kanji learning was low, felt he was able to control stress and boredom in kanji learning, and accordingly scored himself highly on the questionnaire in terms of his self-regulation over the kanji learning task. However, if this same student were to be placed in a context experienced by other participants—who had to study 2000 kanji in order to graduate—his ability to control stress may not have been the same. The questionnaire data alone did not account for these contextual differences in a way that the interview data did.

In terms of cognition, while the Questionnaire of Kanji Learning Strategies provided a detailed description of the actual cognitive strategies employed by the participants in the study, these strategies were self-reported and at times inconsistent with the results of the stimulated recall sessions. An example of this is the over-reported use of pictorial association strategies in the questionnaire. Also, there were instances of use of strategies in stimulated recall sessions that were unreported on the questionnaire, such as one participant's use of mnemonic strategies. These were recorded frequently in the stimulated recall sessions, despite the participant's frequent denial in using this strategy on the questionnaire. Interviews revealed that the resistance to reporting use of mnemonic strategies stemmed from the negative stigma he associated with mnemonic usage. Thus, the qualitative data collection instruments appeared to be more accurate and richer measures of actual strategy use.

Therefore, through the current study's use of both questionnaires and in-depth qualitative data collection instruments, the findings support notions in the literature that qualitative data collection instruments are vital to the understanding of self-regulation and strategic learning. Future studies are encouraged to continue this mode of investigation.

The benefits of a context-specific qualitative approach

The current study's findings illustrate a number of methodological considerations in the approach of future research, which are outlined in the following section. The main suggestion for future methodological design centers on the notion that qualitative, not quantitative, research methods are paramount to future research into strategic learning.

In Woodrow's (2005) critique of language learning strategy taxonomies and research instruments, she emphasizes the need for sample-specific data collection techniques. Miles and Huberman's (1994) assessment of qualitative data analysis may be 18 years old, but still holds true today:

> Qualitative analysis, with its close-up look, can identify mechanisms, going beyond sheer association. It is unrelentingly local, and deals well with the complex network of events and processes in a situation. It can sort out temporal dimension, showing clearly what proceeded what, either through direct observation or retrospection. It is well equipped to cycle back and forth between variables and processes—showing that "stories" are not capricious, but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time. (p. 179)

The current study supports claims of the benefits of qualitative research and analysis. The interviews helped provide a "bigger picture" of self-regulation than the questionnaire allowed. Also the situated approach and qualitative methods allowed the study to address sample-specific issues that the questionnaire did not, thus supporting Woodrow's (2005) claim. Finally, the interviews revealed a complex network of associations of aspects of motivation control that were unique to the kanji-learning task that would not have been observable through use of questionnaires alone, concurring with Miles and Huberman's (1994) claims.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

In conclusion, criticism in LLS research has numerous implications for modern day research in the field of strategic learning, as illustrated in the study outlined in this article. First, a research framework must be created according to the context in which the study takes place. If this framework is to include elements of learner behaviour, rather than cognition alone, the framework should also include the notion of self-regulation due to the key role it is playing in literature at this time. The concepts and framework of self-regulation to explore and explain the learning processes of the kanji learner resulted in rich and valuable data. Second, research has shown huge limitations to questionnaires in strategy research. Thus studies these days must explore other methods of data collection, including interviews and stimulated recall tasks, which the present study found to elicit far richer and more accurate data than the two questionnaires. Focus groups have also proved to be a useful data collection method, particularly in an area where self-regulation of the learning task is yet to be explored and the framework is allowed to emerge from the data. Finally, it is important not to over-generalize the study or its findings beyond the boundaries in which the study takes place. Whereas previous studies have made the mistake of generalizing their findings across learning tasks, contexts and even languages, it is time to explore each learning context with the complexity that it deserves. In particular, the field of self-access and self-directed learning is an ideal context to explore these concepts. Hurd and Lewis (2008) argue that most previous studies have examined classroom contexts and not independent learning settings, which require students to take a higher degree of responsibility for their learning. They also argue that:

> The acknowledged link between strategic competence in language learning, learner autonomy and successful outcomes is a powerful argument for bringing together state-of-the-art research into the theory and practice of language learning strategies in learning environments that do not rely on the physical presence of the teacher. (Hurd & Lewis, 2008, p. xii)

Thus the potential for strategy and self-regulation research in a self-access learning context is immense.

In conclusion, I hope the current study can serve as a road map on how to conduct strategy research in the current academic environment. It is my conviction that this is an exciting time to conduct research into strategic learning, because researchers are no longer bound by over-generalized and problematic models, and they are free to create new frameworks and explore the notion of strategic learning within specific contexts of language learning.

Notes on the contributor

Heath is an assistant professor of applied linguistics at Trinity College, Dublin. He holds a Ph.D. and M.Ed. from The University of Sydney. His doctoral and masters research focused on the strategic learning of Japanese kanji. More recently his research interests have expanded to ESP and CLIL curriculum design and Global Englishes.

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Investigating the Information Needs of University Students in Foundational Foreign Language Courses

Glenna Westwood, University of Lethbridge, Canada

Abstract

This investigation seeks to address two issues: first, to discover if there is evidence that university students in foundational language courses need information resources to support their language learning and second, if such evidence exists, what the specific information resource needs might be and how important those resources are to students' language learning. After engaging in a year of foreign language study, the author used the evidence gathered to develop and conduct a survey of the user needs of language students at the Self Access Centre (CAADI) of the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. Results of the survey supported the personal learning experiences of the author. Over 80% of students surveyed reported using the information resources in the CAADI at least once a week with general grammar books, course text books and films being reported as the most important resources. This investigation provides a starting point for research in to the collection development practices of academic libraries supporting the learning of foreign languages. By examining the information needs of one population, evidence has been provided that these students do indeed need information resources to support their language learning. The study suggests specific resource types that could be important for these users.

Keywords: Self access centers, Self access materials

Academic librarians dedicate much time and energy to anticipating and meeting the information needs of students who come to the library for support with their research assignments. We collect and provide access to the materials they will need; we teach them when, why and how to use and evaluate those materials; and we work with faculty to ensure their students receive the best instruction.

It is interesting to contemplate students who do not come to the library. If this is because some students do not have learning needs requiring library support, perhaps there is no need for concern. However, if they do have learning needs requiring library support two important questions demand attention. First, is the library able to meet the library support needs of these students? Second, if the library is able to meet these needs, how can it identify and respond to such needs?

The investigation described here was motivated by an interest in discovering whether there are unmet library collection needs for students taking foreign language courses. At the University of Lethbridge, collection development, instruction and liaison for the Department of Modern Languages focuses on monograph and periodical research support for students in mid and upper level language, literature and culture classes. Before the author assumed responsibility for these subject areas, there had been no attention given to building collections to support the language learning needs of students in foundational courses. It was the desire to address this gap in past practice that motivated this enquiry.

Aims

Two research questions were defined to focus and direct the investigation:

- Is there evidence that university students in foundational language courses need information resources to support their language learning?
- If such evidence exists, what are the students' specific information resource needs, and how are they important to their language learning?

Literature Review

A review of the early professional literature on information seeking behaviour reveals calls for a redirection away from a systems focus and towards a user focus. In their landmark article, Dervin and Nilan (1986) presented an extensive review of the body of interdisciplinary literature on the research in to information needs and uses, concluding with significant evidence that demonstrated this shift. Pettigrew, Fidel and Bruce followed up in 2002 by supporting this research and providing further evidence of a deeper commitment on the part of library researchers and practitioners to continue to examine and practice this motivation for the user as the central focus of decision making.

On the question of the information needs of undergraduate students, the literature reports numerous studies addressing the information requirements of library user populations in the humanities, but not necessarily for the population under consideration in this investigation. Stone

(1982) reported the deficit of an established body of significant research literature into the information needs of humanities scholars; however Watson-Boone (1994) followed up by highlighting considerable developments in the study of this user population. Humanities scholars can be characterized by their usual inclination for working alone and their preference for consulting primary, rather than secondary sources.

With regards to populations more directly related to those in this investigation, the literature review revealed a significant amount of research focusing on improving access to Spanish language collections and services for Spanish-speaking populations in public libraries in English-speaking communities (Kasten Marquis, 2003). In academic libraries, research into the information needs of foreign language populations has tended to focus less on collections and more on programs and services for non-English speakers and international students (Wang and Frank, 2002), on the more technical aspects of foreign language collection development in academic libraries (Henczel, 2003) or on students and faculty engaged in upper level language or literature research (Sweetland & Christensen, 1997). No research was discovered that specifically addressed the information needs of the population under investigation.

While the literature review does provide strong support for a user centred approach to collection development in different user populations, it did not provide insights specifically into the needs of foreign language students. It seems improbable, however, that foreign language students at the beginning of their language studies have no information needs. If the literature review results accurately indicated a gap in the knowledge base of academic librarianship, conducting primary research could not only answer the original research questions but potentially contribute to professional practice at a much broader level.

Background

In 2003/2004 the author was awarded a year-long leave to study Spanish at the Language School of the University of Guanajuato (UGto.), Guanajuato Mexico. One objective of this leave was to use the first hand experience as a language student to gather evidence that would provide insight into the research questions. By being a student, the relationship with the information resources used in support of language acquisition could be examined, reflected upon and documented. In the end, the nature of specific information needs would be determined and an indication of their importance to language learning identified.

The Language School had a Self Access Centre (SAC or CAADI in Spanish) which supported the language learning needs of its students by providing a variety of collections and services for independent and course-related language learning. The services included individual and group study spaces, peer-facilitated language and homework tutoring, as well as peer-facilitated conversation classes. The focus of the investigation was the collection and included fiction and non-fiction books (novels, textbooks), reference materials (encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks), periodicals (magazines and newspapers), films (feature films, documentaries, travelogues), popular music, books on tape, computer language programs in DVD, video, cassette tape and on the web, and board games - all at beginning to advanced language levels.

The author found that when responding to an externally imposed objective such as preparing for a class presentation or written assignment, the CAADI collection was essential if not entirely adequate. The resources most important to this objective tended to be English/Spanish and Spanish language dictionaries, Spanish language encyclopedia sets and English and Spanish language web sites. Although outdated grammar texts and encyclopedias were helpful in providing foundational support, both the aged and limited collection were a barrier to progress.

The author discovered as well that information resources were also needed when pursuing the internally or self-imposed objectives of independent practice and development of language skills. Resources most important in supporting this objective were English/Spanish language dictionaries, textbooks, computer language programs, fiction and Spanish language films and television programs.

The study leave experience provided evidence that motivated an interest in further exploring the original research questions. Personal experience had demonstrated that information resources do indeed support language learning and specific information resources had been identified as essential. Although a formal observational study had not been conducted during the study leave, the evidence gathered through the personal experience was confirmed every time other students were observed interacting with the information resources in the CAADI. By comparing and formally testing these experiences with those of a similar but larger population, quantitative data could be collected that would support or refute the evidence collected and observed to date.

Methods

Several data gathering methods for collecting and testing the validity of the evidence were considered. The process was framed around certain constraints. Specifically, the author was working alone on the research program and had no special funding, support or relief time from professional duties. A data collection procedure that would be inexpensive and relatively simple to develop and conduct without assistance was required.

In defining the population to be sampled, the original research questions were revisited and the characteristics most representative of the study population were considered. A population with similar overall language learning experience was of primary importance. Students had to be studying a foreign language at a beginning or intermediate level, of a postsecondary age and with access to a collection of information resources supporting their language learning.

With a commitment to return to Guanajuato in March of 2005, a good working relationship with the director and staff of the CAADI and their support in the research endeavour, the students in the CAADI were an appealing population to sample. The population at the University of Lethbridge was considered unsuitable as the research needs and associated information resources supporting undergraduate and graduate research into language and literature studies are more comprehensive than the research question requires. The information resources in the CAADI collection concentrate exclusively on supporting language learning and were the precise resources needed for the study. While a random sample would have been preferable, time, funding and the constraints of a lack of research experience directed the decision to draw a convenience sample from the students in the CAADI at the University of Guanajuato.

It was recognized that this population was not necessarily representative of a broad sample of language students and that any results would have to be considered within this limitation. The sampling period was considered an advantage as it fell roughly in the middle of the spring semester when it was anticipated that the highest number of students would be available. The decision to draw upon as large a number as possible during the sampling period was an attempt to address part of the problems inherent in using samples of convenience.

The first step in choosing a data collection instrument was to eliminate options requiring significant resource support, with significant learning curves, not relevant to the research questions or with which there was no experience (systematic reviews, randomized control trials, etc.). Eliminated also were those that would require conversational interaction or the verbal exchange of ideas (such as in focus groups and interviews) because of language barriers that were very likely to arise during the sampling process. Through this process of elimination, a survey instrument was left as the most suitable method of data collection.

In deciding which types of questions would provide the best evidence, the original research questions were reflected upon and the information gathered and informally observed during the study leave was examined. Five questions were developed to identify specific information resources and measure users' opinions of their importance and motivation for using them. Thirteen resource types were identified, drawn directly from the materials held by the CAADI. Three questions were included to identify age range, language studied and status within the University. Only one open-ended question was included. In all others students were required to select their response from predefined lists, scales and categories. Question type was kept as simple as possible to avoid ambiguity that was likely to be compounded by working in a foreign language.

The survey was approved by the Human Subject Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge and a pilot was conducted by the Director of the CAADI in February 2005. Feedback received from the pilot was used to create the final survey and in March of 2005 the survey was conducted at the CAADI of the University of Guanajuato. [Appendix 1]

Results

Surveys were distributed in person to every patron who entered the CAADI during a one-week period. Participants were asked to complete one survey only. Of the 196 people approached, 193 surveys were distributed and 187 were returned. Not every student answered every question on the survey. Where this occurred the response has been listed in the tables and charts below as "No response".

The majority of survey respondents were between the ages of 18-30 (69.5%). Students of the Language School and students at the University of Guanajuato taking language courses at the Language School made up the vast majority of respondents (92.5%). Students were often enrolled in more than one language course and of the 187 respondents, 108 were studying English, 66 were studying French, 59 were studying Spanish and 27 were studying Italian. 153

(82%) respondents indicated that they normally use the information resources in the CAADI at least once a week whereas 21 said they never use them. (Table 1)

Table 1. Frequency of use of information resources in the CAADI

Frequency of use	**Number of Respondents**
Six times a week +	8
Five times a week	19
Four times a week	25
Three times a week	44
Twice a week	34
Once a week	23
Never	21
No response	13
TOTAL	**187**

Students indicated using the information resources in the CAADI for a variety of reasons, with often more than one reason provided. 60% reported using information resources independently to improve their language skills, 47% to study for a specific class, 36% to complete homework assigned by their professor, 34% to prepare for an assigned class presentation and 17% indicated they used the information resources CAADI for other objectives. (Figure 1)

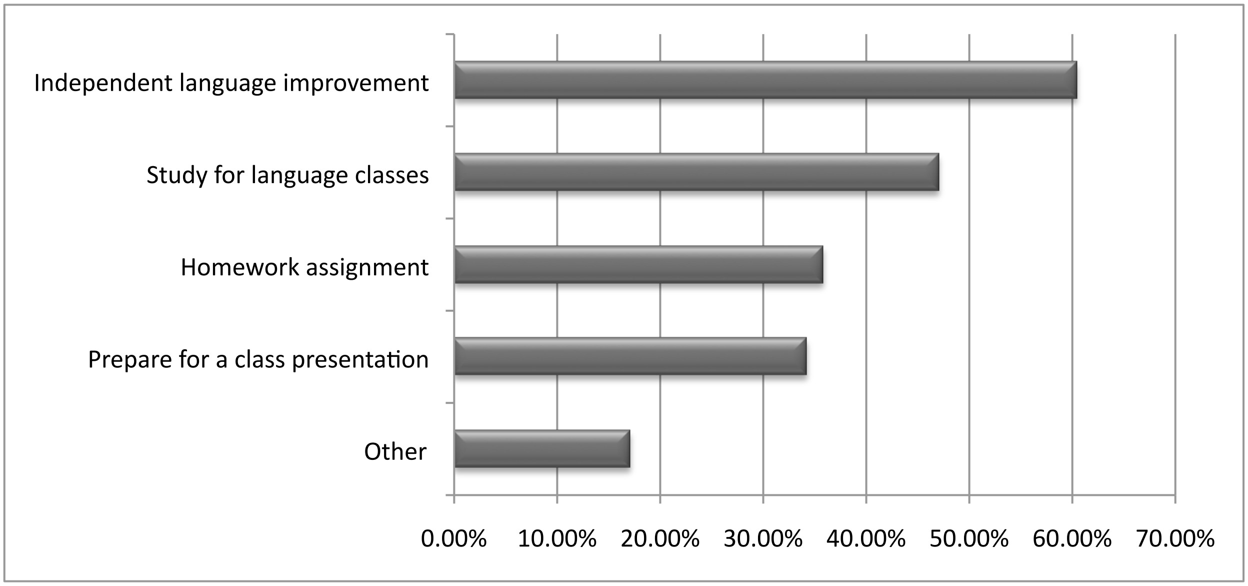

Figure 1. Stated reasons for using information resources in the CAADI

The information resources identified the most often by the most users as either very important or important were general language grammar books (90.4%), followed closely by movies on video/DVD (86.1%) and specific course textbooks (84.5%). Music was a close fourth chosen by 81.8% of respondents, and audio books were next at 75.4%. Of the information resources in the CAADI, language programs on all media were rated important or very important on average 60% with fiction books receiving the lowest rating of very important or important at 40%. (Figure 2)

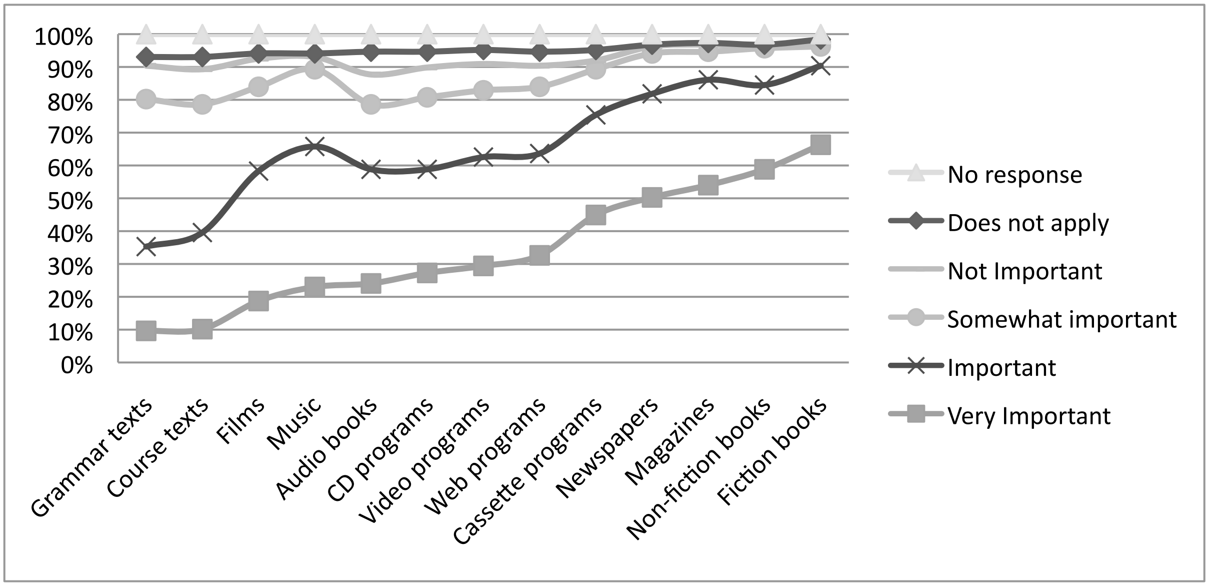

Figure 2. Stated importance of individual information resources in the CAADI

Discussion

It is interesting to note that students at the CAADI appear to use information resources more often when pursuing internally motivated objectives (independent language improvement) than in response to an immediate externally imposed objective such as completion of homework assignments or preparation for a class presentation. This use could indicate that language students have information needs beyond those that are required for the work assigned to them by their professors. Whether this is a manifestation of a type of information need particular to the ‘independent learner’ focus of the self-access model, a characteristic particular to foreign language learners, a reflection of the accessibility of these information resources to the students using them or some other factor is not apparent and is a question deserving further exploration.

None of the information resources identified in the survey as “important” or “very important” had been included in collection development practice at the U of L. The evidence gathered by the survey instrument is a strong indication that this practice warrants a re-examination. The question of textbook collecting is considered as an example. While Hsieh and Runner (2005) explore this issue, their research addresses required texts and focuses on decreasing duplication rather than increasing support. Although there were no textbook assignments at UGto., students were provided with many readings and still found textbooks to be important to their information needs. Perhaps the importance of textbooks as an additional resource to support student learning varies across disciplines. However, survey results at the UGto. suggest that for foreign language learners, textbooks are an important information resource.

A significant question that arises in considering the results of the sample is the validity of the results outside of a CAADI environment. Perhaps a resources centre such as this resembles more closely a special library and should not be examined or compared in relation to an academic library. Perhaps this particular CAADI is not representative of CAADIs worldwide. These are more questions for consideration and deeper investigation.

There are a number of directions to go with this research. The supposed lack of attention paid to the information resource needs of the study population by academic librarianship deserves further exploration. It appears there is another 'library' culture out there – the Self Access culture - that developed as a direct response to the information needs of students in foundational language study (Miller & Rogerson-Revell, 1993). It would be very interesting to study the culture of CAADIs, examining their history and place in academic institutions, surveying the training and background of the professionals contributing to their growth and development and comparing this with current practice within the professional culture of librarianship.

While an appraisal of the literature would suggest a gap in the research of the profession, it does not necessarily reflect a gap in the understanding or knowledge of the information needs of this population by others outside of the profession of academic librarianship. What it may reflect is an overall lower prioritization of this population by academia. The CAADI is a well recognized model within foreign language program instruction around the world (Fouser, 2003) and it may be to the research of the professionals working in this milieu that we must look to for guidance in addressing the information needs of this population.

Conclusion

The investigations in this paper provide a starting point for research in to the collection development practices of academic libraries supporting the learning of foreign languages. By examining the information needs of one population, evidence has been provided that these students do indeed need information resources to support their language learning and suggests specific resource types that could be important for these users. By applying the knowledge gained from both the informal experiences and the evidence gathered during the investigations, the author has been able to improve the collections and services available to the Modern Language students at the University of Lethbridge. Experimenting with peer-facilitated conversation groups in the library, working with faculty to develop the foreign language fiction and non-fiction collections and creating in-house subject headings to improve access to existing language collections are just a few examples of how the investigations have been applied in a practical way. It is hoped that further investigations in this area will continue to contribute to both professional literatures and practices of academic library and language teaching professions.

Notes on the contributor

Glenna Westwood is the Subject Liaison Librarian for the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Lethbridge. Her research activities have developed around an examination of the information needs of students in foundational language courses and incorporate investigations and interests in participant observation & fieldwork in librarianship and the relationships between Self Access Centers and Academic Libraries.

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Appendix 1

POR FAVOR

Esta encuesta se refiere a *los materiales didácticos* del CAADI, no a los talleres, grupos de conversación, asesorías u otros servicios del CAADI

Tu participación es totalmente voluntaria y la información proporcionada será anónima y confidencial

1. Clasifica los materiales didácticos siguiente por la importancia en la adquisición de una segunda lengua:

MATERIALES	1 muy importante	2 importante	3 un tanto importante	4 no importante	5 no aplica
Libros (de cursos de idiomas)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Libros (gramáticas)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Libros (ficción)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Libros (no-ficción)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Periódicos	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Revistas	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Videos/DVD de películas, documentales…	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Música	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Audio-libros	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programas de idiomas (en CD-ROM)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programas de idiomas (en video)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programas de idiomas (en audio casete)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Programas de idiomas (en paginas web)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. India qué tipo de estudiante eres:

   - ☐ Estudiante de la Escuela de Idiomas tomando clases regulares
   - ☐ Estudiante auto-didácta (solamente estudias en el CAADI)

3. En caso de estar tomando clases de idiomas in la Escuela, ¿para qué objeto utilizas los materiales del CAADI? (marca todas las que apliquen):

   - ☐ Para hacer las tareas que me asigna mi maestro
   - ☐ Para estudiar para mis clases de idiomas
   - ☐ Para investigar sobre algún proyecto de clase o presentación que tengo que hacer en clase
   - ☐ Para estudiar o mejorar el idioma, pero de forma autónoma, es decir haciendo actividades que yo elijo, no mi maestro de clase
   - ☐ Otros objetivos (indica por favor) ______________________________

4. Indica en cuantas ocasiones utilizas materiales didácticos de los siguientes niveles:

NIVEL	1 frecuentemente	2 a veces	3 nunca
Principiante	☐	☐	☐
Intermedio	☐	☐	☐
Avanzado	☐	☐	☐

5. ¿En cuántas ocasiones por semana utilizas algún material didáctico del CAADI, en promedio? Se refiere a los materiales, no a los talleres. (ve a pregunta 1 para ejemplos de estos materiales)

Nunca	1	2	3	4	5	6+
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. Escribe cualquier sugerencias que tengas para mejorar las colecciones bibliotecarias para estudiantes de una segunda lengua:

____

____

____

____

7. Indica tu edad por favor:

0-17	18-22	23-30	31-55	56+
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Indica cualquier idioma(s) estas estudiando (marca todas las que apliquen):

☐ inglés
☐ francés
☐ italiano
☐ alemán
☐ español
☐ ruso
☐ griego
☐ latina

9. Indica su categoría:

☐ Estudiante de la Escuela de Idiomas
☐ Maestro de la Escuela de Idiomas
☐ Otro empleado de la Escuela de Idiomas
☐ Estudiante de otra Escuela o Facultad de la Universidad de Gto.
☐ Maestro de otra Escuela o facultad de la Universidad de Gto.
☐ Otro empleado de otra Escuela o Facultad de la Universidad de Gto.
☐ Miembro de la comunidad
☐ Visitante foráneo (indica su lugar de origen por favor)
☐ Otra (indica por favor)

GRACIAS POR SU PARTICIPACION.
UNA COPIA DE LOS RESULTADOS SERA DADA A LA DIRECTORIA DEL CAADI

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Advising Practices: A Survey of Self-Access Learner Motivations and Preferences

Leander S. Hughes, *Saitama University, Japan*
Nathan P. Krug, *Saitama University, Japan*
Stacey L. Vye, *Saitama University, Japan*

Abstract

Based on queries from students who frequently visit the English Resource Center (ERC) at Saitama University, this research team set out to examine what motivational factors encourage ERC attendees to participate for an extended period of time in the Center on a regular basis. Initial indications are that social collaborative learning amongst peers at the Center is the most significant long-term motivational factor for students to become involved with learning English in the ERC. More specifically, this study explores factors that encourage these learners to become regular and perhaps more autonomous center participants in terms of advising practices such as (a) what factors led students to their initial discovery of ERC, (b) what inspired that very first visit, (c) what encouraged learners to continue to attend the Center on a regular basis, (d) what attendees value about the ERC, and finally (e) what might be done to ensure that greater support is provided for students who come to the ERC for the first time.

Keywords: advising, autonomy, language learning, motivation, networking, preferences, self-access center, socialization

Background of the Study

The English Resource Center (ERC) is an English self-access center for the university-wide community located at the Center for English Education and Development (CEED) at Saitama University, open during weekdays between the hours of 15:00 - 17:00. The energy-smart design of the ERC with greenery, visible from the hallway, has a sizable collection of DVDs, graded readers, language resources and books for attendees to borrow, and it provides a more informal English learning environment where countless authentic social interactions occur between the center attendees. The space comfortably accommodates 25-30 learners at a time and although attendees ask about individual learning concerns to the advisors or simply come to borrow resources, nevertheless, peer socialization seems to be a prominent feature of the center that encourages a wider variety of patterns of L2 interaction that the attendees would otherwise not have access to. Consequently, in this study, the four advisors elicited responses from regular ERC attendees to find out more about what factors motivate these students to become regular center participants, how they first discovered the ERC, what happened during their very first visit, what they value about the center, and what improvements can be made. It is our belief that by knowing more precise information about the attendees' perceptions, ERC student peers and the advisors together can more readily facilitate support for current and future attendees in our rapidly expanding center

Connections Between Autonomy and Socially Situated Learning Environments

The goal of the ERC advisors is to facilitate language learning and support the needs of our student population, which may not always be related to English, and to provide support for their educational and personal development as the learners themselves see fit. Furthermore, the physical and structural design of the ERC supports a socially situated environment (see Hughes, Vye, & Krug, 2011; Krug, Wurzinger, Hughes, & Vye, 2011). This philosophy indicates that we facilitate learner autonomy, yet this research team does not label what kind of autonomy is fostered. The reason is because there is some emphasis on the ERC attendees' individual language needs, which requires some aspects of personal or individual autonomy, yet all participants (the students and the advisors alike) share the space while collaborating in a social learning environment. Therefore, labeling a certain type of autonomy here does not serve a purpose (also see Vye, Barfield, & Athanasiou, 2010), rather we simply facilitate autonomy. Additionally, reviews of autonomous language learning often cite Holec's (1981, p. 3) definition. Instead of following suit in this review, we feel Thornbury (2011), summarizes the sentiments of Japan-based teachers who provide practical autonomous solutions with their learners in contexts not unlike our own, precisely:

> *Autonomy, then, is less than a matter of the individual taking charge of his or her own learning (in Holec's much cited formulation), although this may well be the long-term objective. Rather it is the capacity of the group to take charge of its own learning, the group being, "the people in the room," which of course, includes the teacher.* (p. 264)

The "people in the room" in a language learning environment, much like "the people in room of the ERC," then are the teachers/advisors and peers/students who interact with each other in a multitude of ways. In Ushioda's (2007) study of learners and teachers, conditions that facilitate autonomy occur when elements of challenge exist in the learning process and provide a situation which is personally meaningful to the learners. Only then can they internalize their socially constructed goals to feel the motivation for learning a language emanating within themselves as agents of their own regulation. Some theorists argue that there is a distinction between agency and autonomy in socially situated learning, however Benson (2011) argues that this trend is a moot point because both terms are socially mediated and obliged. In another book of autonomy studies, with some based in Japan (Barfield & Brown, 2007), Toohey (2007) asserts that these researchers and their language learners are working in a multitude of ways where in most cases the facilitation of autonomy does not stress individualism, but rather moves toward the equalization of possibilities for social agency with the learners to engage actively in learning with others (Goffman, 1974), which in this context involves "the people in the room of the ERC."

Concerning self-access centers (SACs) in Japan, in the past 10 years, there has been an increase in fostering of motivation, learner autonomy, and self-directed learning in out-of-class settings in universities. The membership of the Japan Association of Self-access Learning (JASAL) has increased in size as more SACs have been established in universities throughout the country. Several studies that focus on surveying the needs of the learners who use or potentially might use SACs have emerged in the Japanese tertiary context, which are particularly useful to the ERC in terms of focusing on the learners' needs and requests. Gilles's (2007; 2010) research suggests that an institution's SAC appeals to intrinsically motivated students who are most often at a higher proficiency of English than the general student population, while students who were more dependent on teachers in the classroom were more hesitant to use the SAC. His conclusion was that plans should be made to help make the SAC more accessible and appealing to a larger student body and calls for stronger links of support for courses taught in English with the SAC. In another study (Johnson & Morikawa, 2011), a large-scale survey was conducted to assess students' need for justification to establish an SAC. They found more awareness was needed about how SACs could support the students' English education because just five of the 236 students stated that they had used a SAC previously. Lastly, Heigham's (2011) study was of much interest to us as our advisor faculty is spread rather thinly with a larger attendee population than in previous years. Heigham found the need in a rapidly growing SAC for peer advisors to take charge of the center, facilitate peer learning with center attendees and take control over the development of their own English at the same time. This represented a win-win solution in terms of learner development and the enhancement of support for the center.

The Context of the Study

The following section details the data-gathering procedure of the study, the structure of the questionnaire given to regular attendees of the ERC (the participants of the study). These methods were utilized in order to establish what motivates attendees to come to the ERC, how they might participate during their stay—the most common factor conceivably being social in nature—and what suggestions the participants have to make this ever-growing center better serve their needs.

The data-gathering procedure

In order to look more closely at students' reasons for becoming (regularly) involved with the ERC—and the networks or bonds created between attendees—a short ten-point questionnaire was designed and administered to attendees. To conserve space, the questionnaire is shown in a condensed, summarized form in this paper (see Appendix A). As can be seen, the questionnaire was largely opened-ended in nature in order to allow attendees to provide freer, more detailed perceptions, ideas, and beliefs—allowing for unpredicted information to emerge from the data, rather than using a closed (and, hence, more restricted) questioning format (Burns, 1999).

Requiring approximately fifteen minutes to complete, the questionnaire was made available to respondents between October 12, 2010 and November 29, 2011—which is the period during which electronic records of ERC attendance were kept and continuing through to completion of the data-gathering process of this investigation. For reasons of convenience and practicality, SurveyMonkey (2011) <http://www.surveymonkey.com> was chosen as the primary means of distributing the questionnaire. It was made available to students on two computers within the ERC (during ordinary operational hours), and it was also distributed to attendees via email.

For this study, it was particularly important that responses were sought from experienced ERC attendees. The research team, therefore, decided to focus on those most familiar with all aspects of the Center. Compared to newer attendees, experienced ERC-goers should be more knowledgeable about what happens in the ERC space, they ought to know more clearly about what they want from this space, and they should be able to provide more complete responses to the questionnaire (especially those questionnaire items seeking information concerned with the formation of interpersonal networks). On the other hand, the research team felt that newer attendees (i.e., those less familiar with the daily operation of the ERC space and the activities that take place there) might provide skewed or biased responses unintentionally through feeling pressure to give overly positive responses—thus avoiding potentially helpful criticism or feedback for the present study. As a result, it must be noted here that respondents were approached by the research team and asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was, thus, distributed in a non-random manner.

Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was constructed in such a fashion that clusters of questions target specific information. Item 1 calls for respondents to identify themselves through the provision of student identification numbers. Although somewhat of a contentious issue, the research team decided that the gathering of attendee identification data throughout the questionnaire was essential for this study—in other words, identification data would provide the research team with a reliable means of mapping attendee networks network (by, for example, permitting the authors to match ID numbers with names that respondents list in Items 6 and 7 a little further on in the questionnaire). Items 2-4 elicit information concerning attendees' first visit to the ERC. Items 5-7 go on to examine reasons or motives for sustained visitations and the networks established among attendees during this time. Specifically with reference to Items 6 and 7, data collected through these questionnaire items could add support for or against the hypothesis that socialization is the main long-term motivation for students to attend the ERC. Items 8 and 9 seek to explore those advising practices that students engage in and find beneficial. The final item, Item 10, calls for suggestions for improvement of the ERC space from the participants' perspective.

The participants

A total of 30 ERC attendees participated in this study. The 30 participants comprise but a fraction of the population of 409 students who have visited the ERC in the 154 days between October 12, 2010 and November 29, 2011.

It is important to note that the study participants attended the ERC much more frequently than the majority of the ERC population. Whereas the typical attendee visited the ERC an average of 5.85 times over the 154-day period (SD=11.42, Min=1, Max=95), those participating in this study attended an average of 22 times (SD=18.69, Min=3, Max=68).

Therefore, in the ensuing discussion, it is important for the reader to bear in mind that the findings of this study are reflective of this purposefully chosen sample, which consisted of the most motivated ERC users (in terms of their frequency of ERC usage). To a degree, the implications and conclusions drawn from the sample population can be extended to the greater ERC population. However, to provide more depth and to help create a more detailed picture of the factors that encourage learners to become regular, autonomous center participants, additional studies involving wider, randomly selected samples are called for in the future.

Results and Discussion

In the following section, we explore the results of the survey, investigating their implications with regard the reasons why students attend the ERC, the advising practices they value, and the practices they desire more of.

How respondents first found out about the ERC

A simple tallying of responses and counting of referrers named for Item 2 revealed that 11 (37%) of the respondents found out about the ERC on their own, whereas 19 (63%) were referred by someone else. Of those who were referred, eight were referred by teachers, while 11 were referred by peers.

Reasons for first visit versus reasons for continuing to visit

In this section, we contrast the types of reasons students gave for why they first visited (Item 3) and why they continue to visit (Item 5) employing two complementary approaches.

For our first approach, we subjectively determined how the responses could be meaningfully, yet concisely categorized, discovering that we could divide them into four different categories or orientations of motivation: (language) learning, social, resource and teacher-orientations. The following lists responses exemplifying each.

> Learning: "Because I want to study abroad next year, so I had to study English very hard."
>
> Social: "The members are so kind."
>
> Resource: "Because I want to read English books."
>
> Teacher: "Because an English teacher was telling the students about ERC and I thought it would be interesting."

Often a single response indicated more than one of these orientations, as demonstrated below:

> "At first I simply wanted to practice speaking English, but later, I also wanted to have fun in the ERC." (Learning and Social)
>
> "because it is fun to talk with someone, also i can borrow some books and DVDs." (Social and Resource)

However, no single response ever indicated all four orientations.

After, determining which categories of orientation applied to each response, we summed the number of times each orientation applied and calculated percentages for each response set. Figure 1 displays the results:

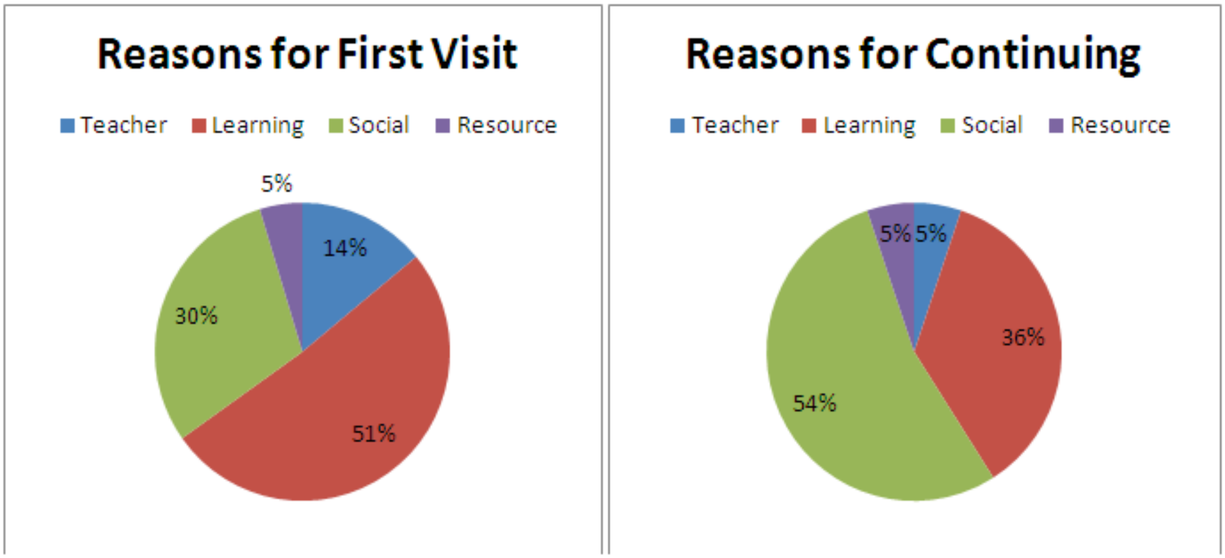

Figure 1. Reasons for first visit and for continuing to visit the ERC

A quick glance reveals a decrease in learning orientation (from 51 to 36 percent) and teacher orientation (from 14 to 5 percent) accompanied by an increase in social orientation from 30 to 54 percent. Thus, while motivation to learn the language served as main factor in bringing students to the ERC, the social aspect of the ERC appears to be the main motivation to continue attending.

For our second, arguably less subjective, method of analysis, we subtracted the frequencies of words occurring in Item 5 responses from the frequencies of the same words in Item 3 responses (combining words in the same family). We then extracted content words whose difference in frequency between the two sets was more than one standard deviation above or below the mean difference as demonstrative of the difference between the responses. Figure 2 displays the results:

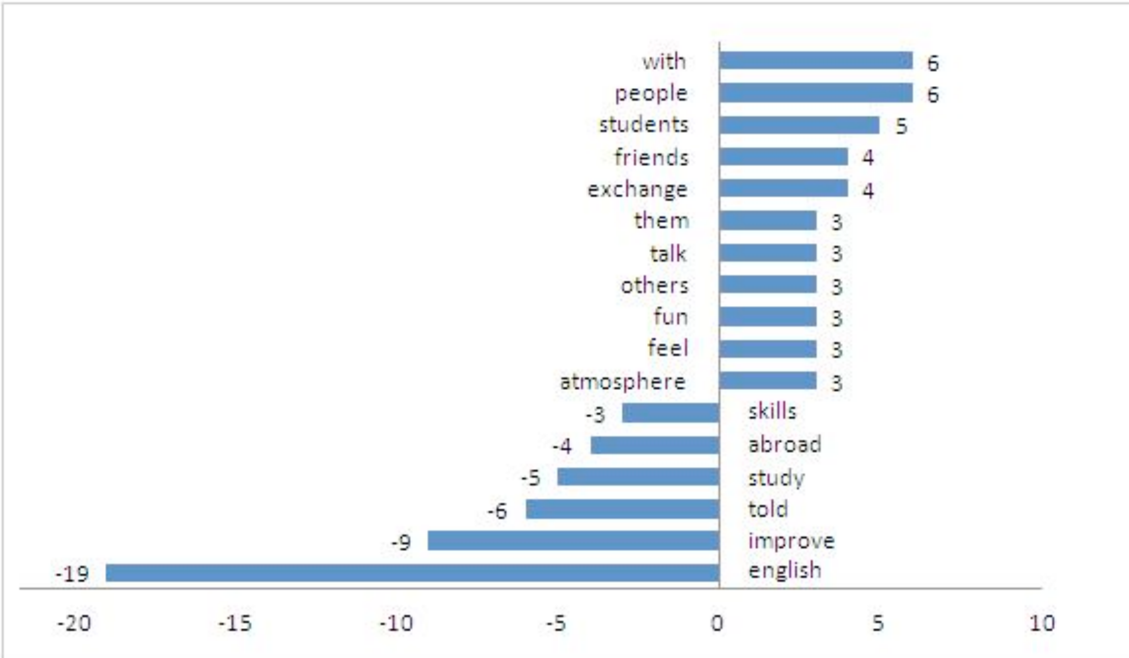

Figure 2. Item 5 response word frequencies minus item 3 response word frequencies

As shown, the words which increased in frequency (*with, people, students, friends, exchange, them, talk, others, fun, feel, atmosphere*) are of a social nature, whereas most of the words that decreased (*skills, abroad, study, improve, English*) suggest a learning orientation. Meanwhile the leftover decreased word, "told," hints at a teacher orientation. In fact, except for a single case, "told" was always used in conjunction with "teacher" or a teacher's name as in, "I was told to come here by [teacher A] and [teacher B]." Thus, the word frequency contrast reflects the same changes in motivation to visit the ERC that are indicated by the more subjective, initial analysis. Students began mostly with an intention to "learn," but continued visiting mainly to socialize with their peers.

Valued advising and peer-advising practices

This section analyzes the responses to Items 8 and 9 using the two contrast methods previously employed for Items 3 and 5. However, upon examining the responses, we found that all Item 9 responses referred to teachers and resource orientation, and in the composite of the two sets of responses, there was only one response that referred to resources. Thus, in place of teacher and resource orientation, we realized a new category of orientation was necessary: (non-linguistic) content/knowledge orientation. The following lists examples of each of the categories used.

Learning: “teaching me correct English”

Social: “facilitating conversations between students”

Content/Knowledge: “giving me a lot of information about various topics I do not know so much.”

As with before, no single response indicated all of categories together. Figure 3 displays a contrast between the resulting percentages of times each orientation applied to Item 8 responses versus Item 9 responses.

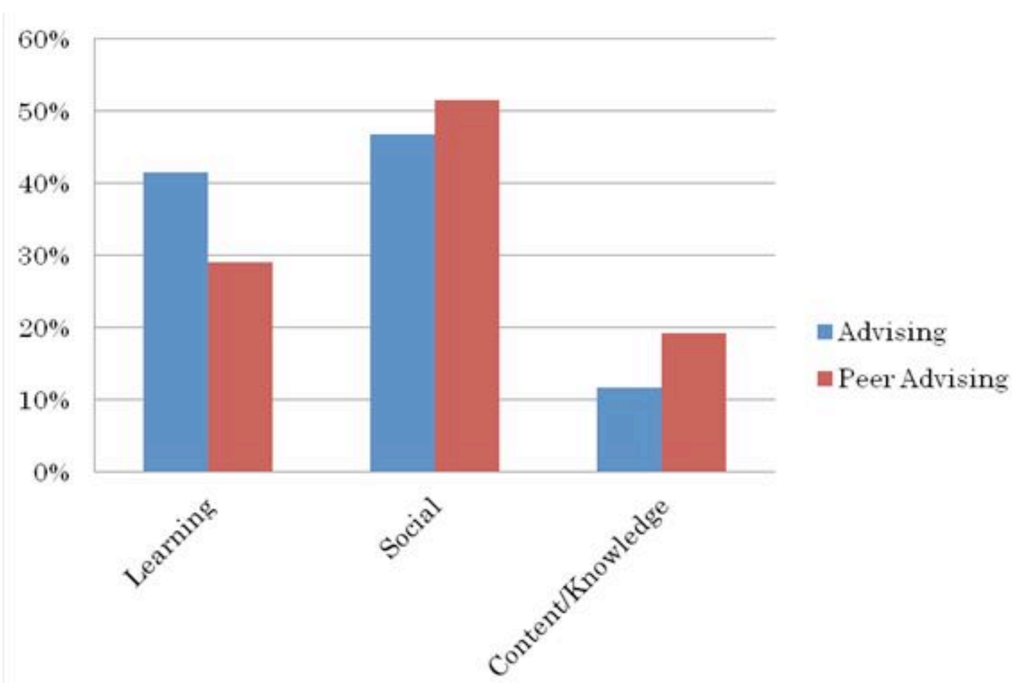

Figure 3. Orientations of valued advising versus peer-advising practices

As shown, socialization once again takes a lead role, with socially oriented behaviors comprising 47 percent of advising practices and 52 percent of peer-advising practices. Next, whereas 42 percent of advising practices were learning oriented, only 29 percent of peer advising were oriented toward learning. Finally, and interestingly, 19 percent of peer advising practices were oriented toward content/knowledge, while only 12 percent of advising practices took this orientation. Thus, not only do socially oriented practices account for the majority of advising practices that were valued enough to be recalled by respondents, peers also seem to do more to keep each other interested than advisors do. The word frequency contrast displayed in Figure 4 corroborates these findings. Item 8 responses showed a higher frequency of words suggesting that peers were known for engaging in more socially oriented advising practices (*friends, fun, listening, others, together, with, talking*) and content/knowledge oriented practices (*different, experience, ideas, new, know*), while engaging less in learning-oriented advising practices as shown by the relative absence of correcting, teaching, checking, and pronunciation compared to advisors' practices.

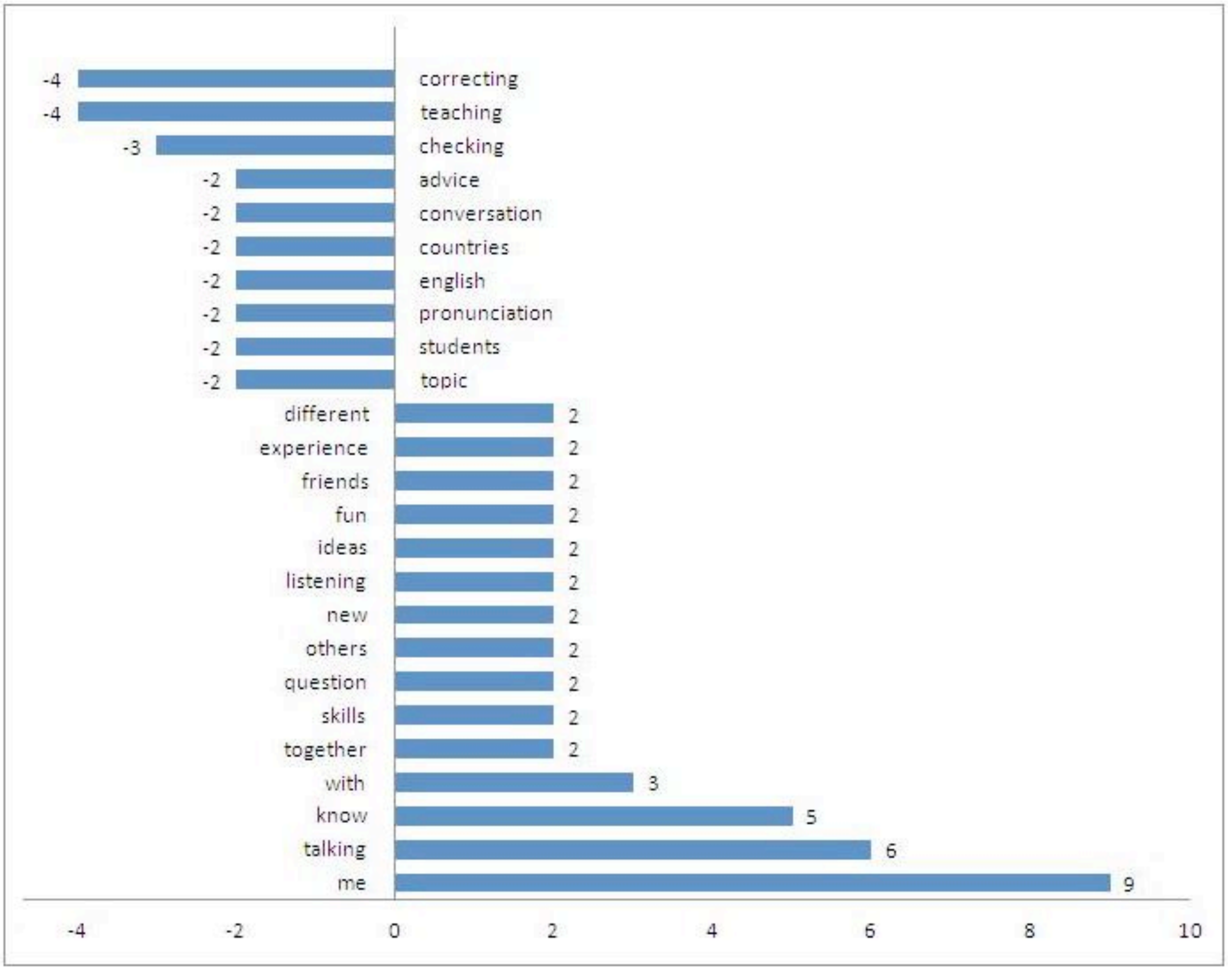

Figure 4. Item 8 response word frequencies minus item 9 response word frequencies

Sought-after advising practices

Through examining the responses to Items 10 and 4 this section investigates the kinds of advising and peer-advising practices students might benefit from having more of. The first step in this investigation involved two of the researchers classifying each suggestion given by respondents. Unlike the previous analyses, classification this time was relatively straightforward with each suggestion clearly fitting one classification more than any other. Table 1 displays information for classes of responses for which the number of responses was greater than three.

Table 1. Most frequent suggestions by study participants

Classification	**Example Response**	**Number of Responses**
Open Hours	"longer open hours"	12
Space	"bigger room"	8
Atmosphere	"more friendly atmosphere even if people don't have enough English speaking skills"	6
Advertising	"Advertising about the ERC. I suggest teachers should advertise about the Halloween party, for example."	4

Suggestions on open hours, space, and advertising were all expected, given the small size of the ERC, limited open hours, and current lack of publicity. However, the six suggestions for improving the atmosphere came as a surprise, after reading and analyzing responses to Item 5 such as:

> "Good atmosphere is one of the reasons why I continue to come to the ERC. I can have very good time. I can make friends with a lot of people and talking with them is very fun!"

Also, of the four types of suggestions listed above, the atmosphere suggestions are the only ones that deal directly with advising practices *per se* (see Appendix B for the full list of suggestions). These suggestions indicated that respondents would like more advising practices oriented toward welcoming and encouraging attendees, especially newcomers who may not be confident in their language skills.

As "newcomers" are explicitly mentioned in the suggestions, we examined respondents' accounts of their own first visit to illuminate the reasons for the desire for a friendlier atmosphere.

We thus classified responses to Item 4 into those which indicated an uncomfortable first experience, a comfortable one, one which began as uncomfortable but became comfortable, and those which could not be classified (see Figure 5).

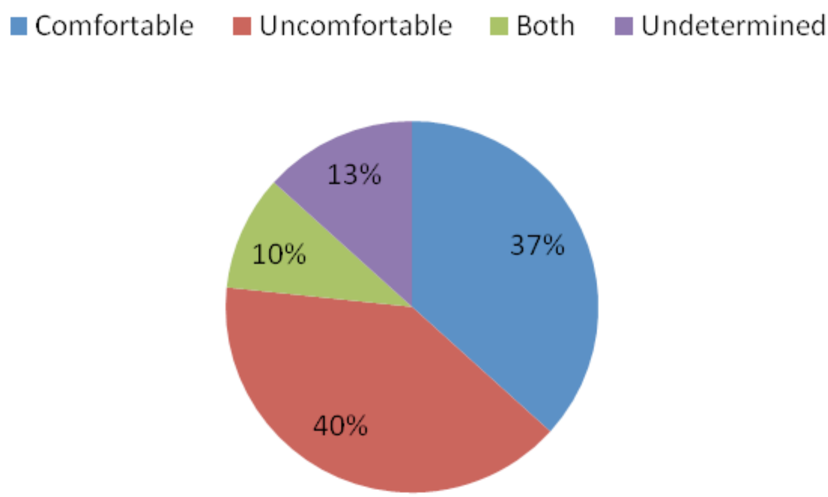

Figure 5. Comfort level during first visit to the ERC

As shown, the largest portion of respondents (40 percent) had an uncomfortable first visit. Meanwhile, a slightly smaller portion of respondents was comfortable (37 percent) and 13 percent of respondents did not mention how they felt during their first visit. Finally, 10 percent began their visit feeling uncomfortable, but over the course of their visit became comfortable. Although two of these students gave only general reasons for this transformation (the friendliness of other people in the ERC), one describes what happened specifically:

> "I saw a lot of people in there. I couldn't talk with them at first, but one of them spoke to me. So, I could speak."

Further examination revealed two common elements that seemed to have contributed to respondents' discomfort: 1) the large number of people in the ERC at the time and 2) their feeling of being less proficient than other attendees. Of these two elements, the former was more common (eight responses versus two). We then investigated for a correlation between responses that mentioned the number of people and those which indicated an uncomfortable experience. A weak but significant correlation of $r(28)=.33$, $p=.036$ emerged, indicating that newcomers may be more prone to having an uncomfortable first visit when the room is crowded, and therefore that advisors and peers should make greater efforts to help newcomers feel welcome when the ERC is busy.

Conclusion

This study set out to better ascertain what factors motivated attendees of the English Resource Center (ERC) at Saitama University, Japan, to become regular participants within the center. In doing so, this paper examined what led participants to their initial discovery of the ERC, what occurred during that initial visit, what the attendees value about the ERC, and, finally, what additional support could, or perhaps should, be provided to future first-time visitors.

Initially, the attendees took a self-oriented view of the role of the ERC (e.g., the reason students first came to the ERC was to improve individual language skills). However, the students continued to attend due to other- or peer-oriented factors such as socializing and networking. The most mentioned valued advising practices were also social in nature. Of the suggestions mentioned, providing more support for students who come to the ERC for the first time appeared as an outstanding element in need of improvement, especially during times when the center is crowded.

Our findings offer some practical implications for policy development both at our center as well as other centers with philosophies similar to ours, particularly those where attendance is voluntary. First, participants in our study were initially attracted to our SAC mainly because they believed it was a good place to learn English. Thus, centers looking to increase the number of their attendees may do well to publicize whatever evidence they possess indicating that they indeed offer an opportunity to effectively learn the language. Second, the majority of our participants were referred to our center by friends who were already attending, so SACs might find that the quickest and most efficient way to attract new attendees is to actively encourage current attendees to bring their friends. Most importantly though, our findings suggest that, more than publicity, materials, or language pedagogy *per se*, the key to fostering long-term motivation to attend seems to lie in nurturing the establishment of social bonds between attendees. The question of how this may be more effectively accomplished is one we look forward to investigating in future studies.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleague and fellow ERC advisor Associate Professor Adriana Edwards Wurzinger for her expert advice and assistance throughout the different stages of this research project. We would also like to thank the participants for volunteering their time and valuable insights into the ERC.

About the contributors

Leander Hughes is an Assistant Professor at the Saitama University Center for English Education and Development. He is interested in quantitative language research methods and in applying findings in current social psychology to the language learning context. His other interests include computer assisted language learning, learner autonomy, and communicative task effectiveness.

Nathan Krug is an Assistant Professor in the Center for English Education and Development at Saitama University. He has research interests spanning the fields of conversation analysis, discourse analysis and CALL. Nathan is interested in language learning and second-language conversation within the computer-mediated environment.

Stacey Vye is an Assistant Professor at the Saitama University Center for English Education and Development (CEED) in Japan. Her research interests and publications include reflection, learner and teacher autonomy in language education including the connections between both processes.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Summary of the Questionnaire

1. Please enter your Student ID Number: ____________________

2. Who first told you about the ERC?
(a) No one. I discovered it by myself.
(b) I found out from a person named: ____________________

3. Why did you decide to try visiting the ERC the first time? Please explain in detail, giving names if applicable.
(One large text box was provided with ample space for a response.)

4. Please describe what you saw and felt when you first entered the ERC.
(One large text box was provided with ample space for a response.)

5. What made you decide to continue coming to the ERC (please give names if applicable)?
(One large text box was provided with ample space for a response.)

6. Presently, who do you know who attends the ERC (please list their full names)?
(Ten numbered text boxes were provided for the individual listing of names, plus an additional text box was provided for the purpose of grouping together other as-yet-unlisted names.)

7. Of the people listed above, who do you spend time with outside of the ERC (including on internet sites such as Facebook)?
(Ten numbered check boxes were provided, corresponding to the numbered text boxes in Item 6. An additional text box was provided for the purpose of indicating other as-yet-unmatched personal connections.)

8. How do other students in the ERC help you? Please list as many ways as you can think of.
(Ten text boxes were provided for the listing of individual advising practices, plus an additional text box was provided for the purpose of including other as-yet-unmentioned advising practices.)

9. How do teachers in the ERC help you? Please list as many ways as you can think of.
(Ten text boxes were provided for the listing of individual advising practices, plus an additional text box was provided for the purpose of including other as-yet-unmentioned advising practices.)

10. How can the ERC be improved? You can include suggestions about the room, teacher practices, equipment, materials, open hours…anything you want! Please list as many ideas as you can.

(Ten text boxes were provided for the listing of individual suggested improvements, plus an additional text box was provided for the purpose of including other as-yet-unmentioned suggested improvements.)

Appendix B

The Six Suggestions for Improving the ERC Atmosphere

"Make some board to indicate we are welcome."
"more friendly atmosphere even if people don't have enough English speaking skills"
"put a special care about newcomers"
"removing exclusiveness"
"The room is little bit difficult to enter, and everyone hesitate to enter this room first time."
"to speak to student more positively"

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Supporting the Language and Learning Development of EAL Students in Australian Higher Education

Paul J. Moore, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Abstract

The role of learning advising in improving the educational outcomes of students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) in Australian universities has received significant attention in recent years. A combination of research findings, governmental pressure and media scrutiny has provided renewed impetus for universities to address issues of language proficiency and academic literacy amongst the growing population of onshore international students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). In this paper, I discuss the role of *academic language and learning* advising in the Australian university context, including how this practice is influenced by a range of political, pedagogical and practical factors. In doing so, I draw on Carson and Mynard's (2012) analysis of the aims, practices, skills, locations and discourses of *advising in language learning* to explore how the two fields might inform each other.

Keywords: advising; contextual influences; policy and practice;

Apart from a shared acronym, the emerging field of *advising in language learning* (Carson & Mynard, 2012) shares many features with *academic language and learning* in Australia; including the provision of *individual consultations* (ICs) as an important component. This paper explores the role of learning advising within the Australian university context, and how a renewed focus on English language proficiency in Australian higher education might call for stronger links between the two fields, and a more explicit focus on language development in ICs. The paper first briefly outlines the current context of higher education in Australia with regard to the English language proficiency of EAL students. Following Carson & Mynard's (2012) analysis of the role of the '(language) learning advisor', I then explore the role of the academic language and learning advisor in the changing Australian university context, in terms of the aims, practices, skills, locations and discourses of learning advising.

The Policy Framework

While there has long been public discussion regarding the English language proficiency of international students in Australia, renewed impetus began in 2006, when a report into Australia's skilled migration policy reported that international students' "deficits" in terms of English communication and Australian cultural knowledge were not being met by their academic training (Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006, p. 33). Although Birrell's contributions to the higher education debate reinforced the portrayal of EAL students as 'deficient' and in need of remedial and supplementary English classes (cf. Birrell 2006, p. 63), it also had the effect of raising the profile of English language proficiency in higher education on the federal agenda. This was followed by a series of federal reports, laws, codes, principles and the creation of a new standards authority, each of which relates to English language proficiency in higher education, as outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1. A policy framework for English language proficiency in Australian higher education.

Year	Title	Description
2007	*National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2007 (The National Code)*	Standards for providers of education and training for overseas students – including monitoring and supporting student progress and identifying students "at risk of not progressing" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007, p. 19).
2008	*Review of Australian higher education: Final report.*	Aims to widen participation in higher education; includes widening international student base and improving English language skills within curricula.
2009	*Good practice principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities*	Ten principles regarding the importance and development of English language proficiency in University education.
2010	*Stronger, simpler, smarter ESOS: Supporting international students: Final report.*	Recommends that "English language entry levels and support are appropriate for the course and, where relevant, the expected professional outcomes" (Baird, 2010, p. 11).
2011	*Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011*	TEQSA: a new agency with oversight for the implementation of the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards).* The focus is on assessment of outcomes of higher education, including English language outcomes; e.g., exit testing of English language proficiency (TEQSA, 2011, p. 18). Draft *English Language Standards for Higher Education* are being considered by TEQSA as at May, 2012.

In sum, the policy framework for English language proficiency support for EAL students aims to establish 'appropriate' entry standards, to monitor progress and support students 'at risk', and to assure that relevant outcomes are met, in terms of successful completion and finding employment.

Perspectives on the Nature of English Language Proficiency in Australian Higher Education

While there has been concern at the policy level that "providers are not adequately considering the actual English language needs of a student to complete a particular course" (Baird, 2010, p. 10) and that students may, in fact, decline in proficiency over the term of their degree (Knight, 2011), there have been a variety of sometimes conflicting statements about what *English language proficiency* is, what can be included under the banner of English language proficiency in university contexts, and what role it plays in the so-called stages of the student life-cycle (from pre-entry to successful learning outcomes to post-course employment or further study).[1]

The "Good practice principles for English language proficiency for international students in Australian universities" document (GPPs, AUQA, 2009) loosely defines English language proficiency as:

> the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their university studies… the ability to organise language to carry out a variety of communication tasks … (p. 1)

While this definition appears to be limited to academic contexts, the GPPs make explicit references to the role of language in determining "effective social interaction," "academic achievement" and "employment outcomes." (p. 1)

Murray (2010), in a response to the GPPs, defines English language proficiency as follows:

> "Proficiency" refers to a general competence in language and comprise[s] a set of generic skills and abilities captured in Canale and Swain's (1980) framework … [t]hese generic skills and abilities represent an investment in language that can be 'cashed in' in any potential context of use … they are prerequisites to developing academic literacy and professional communication skills. (p.58)

Harper, Prentice and Wilson (2011) reject the argument that language proficiency is distinct from, and a pre-requisite for, academic literacy and professional skills. They also reject the argument that there is an identifiable "threshold level [of proficiency] which students must traverse in order to participate in academic or professional literacies" (p. 41), asserting that this approach encourages an approach to support that is remedial, decontextualised, and which construes EAL students as deficient. Harper et al. suggest a model of integrated literacies (academic, professional and 'everyday') which have a common "generic core of knowledge and skills in English;" each of which develops simultaneously (pp. 45-6). They further argue that a decontextualised focus on generic language proficiency (which they equate with grammatical instruction) is of little value, and that what is needed is "immersion in the language domain and supported development within the domain of language use: the discipline." (p. 46).

The above responses to the GPPs in terms of defining language proficiency provide an insight into how issues of language proficiency in one context can influence definitions of language proficiency itself. These interpretations also have direct implications for how the development of English language proficiency is supported in higher education.

Strategies for Supporting the Development of English Language Proficiency

The recent policy focus on English language proficiency requires universities to be more explicit about their support for language development for social, professional and academic purposes. A major challenge with regard to the government's focus on English language proficiency is that much of the focus of advising in ALL centres has been the development of academic literacies. One indicator of this is the Australian Association for Academic Language and Learning's (AALL, 2012) statement regarding the role of ALL advisors:

> Our primary role therefore is to assist students to understand the cultures, purposes and conventions of different academic genres and practices ... This objective of teaching students how to take control of their academic writing and learning is fundamental to our pedagogic philosophy.

Many universities are developing and implementing English language proficiency support strategies, which often involve collaboration among faculties, support units, humanities schools focusing on language and/or linguistics, and on-campus providers of pretertiary English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS). In some cases, university support services have been restructured under themes closely related to English language proficiency; see, for example, the University of South Australia's (2011) *Language and Learning Services* (L^3) and the University of Technology Sydney's (2012) *Higher Education Language and Presentation Support* (HELPS) program. These programs in particular share a focus (though not exclusively) on the provision of generic extra-curricula support in the form of online materials, workshops and individual consultations. To some extent, this involves a refocusing and rebranding of existing academic language and learning support services, which are provided at most universities in Australia.

The strong message in the GPPs and related policy (e.g., Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) is that activities focused on the development of English language proficiency should be embedded in coursework and assessment. While language and learning advisors collaborate with faculty academics on projects to integrate a focus on the development of language, academic and/or professional communication skills within curricula (e.g., Dunworth & Briguglio, 2010; Shaw, Moore & Gandhidasan, 2007), a strong focus on integration can have the effect of devaluing more generic language and learning advising activities, including individual consultations (cf. Percy, James, Stirling & Walker, 2004, for example).

The Role of the Learning Advisor

Academic language and learning advisors in Australian universities play several roles (cf. Percy et al., 2004 for a representation of the range of practices at my university), but here I focus on the practice of advising in individual consultations (ICs) with students, which is the closest to the practice of learning advising outlined by Carson and Mynard (2012). Carson and Mynard outline five aspects of advising for language learning – *aims*, *practices*, *skills*, *locations*, and *discourse* – and these are explored here with regard to academic language and learning advising in the context of Australian higher education.

Aims

The aim of learning advising in contexts outlined by Carson and Mynard (2012) is essentially to foster learner autonomy through various processes, such as helping learners to identify their own language learning needs, select appropriate resources and evaluate their language learning. Within the Australian context outlined above, the major aims of learning advising are to support university learning in general, and to support the development of academic literacy in students in their chosen disciplines in particular. Supporting the development of English language proficiency for other purposes (e.g., social or professional communication) may also be a focus of ICs, and this focus may become stronger as universities address the issues arising from government reports and policies mentioned earlier, particularly relating to preparing graduates who are able to live and work successfully in Australian society.

While the language and learning advisor's aims may be fostering the development of disciplinary language and learning skills in the learner, the majority of students in the current context engage in ICs with a strong focus on written assessment tasks. Learning advising is often construed by non-specialists as editing (Woodward-Kron, 2007) or 'fixing learners' language problems.' Students may also attend ICs with the express purpose of having the grammar or expression in their written assignments 'fixed;' hence the need for explicit guidelines regarding the aim of ICs.

Lea & Street (1998) identify three approaches to supporting learning in higher education: academic skills, academic socialisation and tertiary literacies approaches. They associate an academic skills approach with a deficit model (mentioned earlier) where the focus of interventions is remediation, while the academic socialisation approach aims to acculturate learners to so-called homogeneous disciplinary discourses. They propose a tertiary literacies approach which emphasises learners' negotiation of disciplinary practices, arguing that such practices are neither homogenous nor fixed. They further argue that the tertiary literacies approach is intended to subsume rather than replace the other approaches.

Practices

Given their common focus on disciplinary discourse, ICs often involve advisors attempting to deconstruct this implicit discourse and make it explicit to the learners. This often involves placing the learner in the position of content expert (e.g., Clerehan, 1997), while the advisor, in collaboration with the learner, attempts to interpret the disciplinary discourse and the learner's attempts at constructing 'appropriate' texts. This work is informed by a range of fields, such as genre theory, applied linguistics, systemic functional linguistics and critical theory, as well as the diverse backgrounds from which language advisors come (Percy & Stirling, 2004).

Like the approach outlined by Carson and Mynard (2012), the emphasis of ICs in the Australian context is on the co-construction of knowledge (e.g., Clerehan, 1997; Wilson, Li, Collins & Couchman, 1998; Woodward-Kron, 2007) as well as the scaffolded development of learner autonomy (Collins, Shrensky, & Wilson, 1998).

Skills

Carson and Mynard (2012) note that while “advising is more complicated than mastering a set of skills,” (p. 19) the identification of skills used by advisors provides an insight into the complexity of learning advising. In Australian contexts, as in those outlined by Carson and Mynard’s, counselling and teaching skills have been identified as important (e.g., goal-setting, modelling; cf. Chanock, 1995; Kelly, 1996; Collins et al., 1998). In the context of Australian higher education, it is considered advantageous, but not essential, to have a degree in language teaching, and other, equally important attributes of a learning advisor include:

- an understanding of appropriate strategies for analysing discipline-specific discourses and information literacies; and
- proven experience in teaching others to develop the strategies needed to engage effectively in academic discourses and literacies, at a higher or further education level (AALL, 2010)

In this context, while learning advisors might come from a range of academic backgrounds, “having some foundation in language, literacy, learning and pedagogical theory provides us [learning advisors] with the tools to negotiate and ‘unpack’ the variety of discourses and teaching practices that we are expected to deal with on a daily basis” (Percy & Stirling, 2004, p. 55). Given the diversity of discourses with which learning advisors are engaged, to some extent a background in the discourse of any academic discipline adds to the richness of the field.

Location

Carson & Mynard (2012) point to studies where advising occurs online or in classrooms, but they note that the main site for language learning advising is the self-access centre. Learning advising in Australian higher education occurs in a range of contexts, and, as noted above, advisors come from a range of backgrounds. Of nearly 500 learning advisors in Australian institutions approximately half are academic staff, the other half being general staff, and the majority of these are employed in centralised academic language and learning units, though a significant number are employed within faculties (AALL, 2011). ICs may be located in centralised units, in faculties, in classrooms, or they may be conducted through communications technology for distance students. Engagement in ICs may be initiated, for example, by a student, as the result of a recommendation from a faculty academic, or as part of a broader collaborative project between learning advisors and faculty academics. While ICs may be offered on a voluntary and confidential basis, they also may be recommended as part of a program to support students deemed 'at risk' under the National Code 2007 (see Table 1). These and other contextual features (e.g., time allocated, limitations on access, university policy; Stevenson & Kokkinn [2009]) may influence the interaction between advisor and learner and the IC's outcomes.

One of the advantages of locating language learning advising in a self-access centre, as noted by Carson and Mynard (2012), is that resources to support learners' language development are available in the immediate environment. While centralised units in Australian contexts offer easily accessible resources in print or online to support student learning, outside language learning programs there is no clear mention of comprehensively-resourced self-access centres in the literature.

Discourse

There has been little research into the discourse of ICs in Australian higher education, but the research that has been carried out, like that identified by Carson & Mynard (2012), provides insights into the nature of learning advising, theoretical perspectives informing such practice, and the strategies advisors and learners engage in.

Collins et al. (1998) aimed to identify strategies learners and advisors used to develop learner autonomy, drawing on the notion of scaffolding within Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD), as well as previous applications of counselling strategies to learning advising (e.g., Chanock, 1995; Kelly, 1996). Based on advisor reflections and videoed ICs, they identified a range of teacher-dominated, collaborative and learner-dominated strategies which arose in learner-advisor interaction. They note that an integral part of learning advising is recognising when it is appropriate to use didactic and/or more learner-directed strategies.

Clerehan (1997), drawing on a range of theoretical perspectives, also investigated scaffolding within the ZPD by analysing the dialogic construction of learning in three ICs. Her analysis highlights the collaborative nature of the discourse, stages through which the discourse progresses, and how both advisor and learner negotiate objectives of the interaction at different stages. One notable finding related to the fact that opportunities for learning arose from the interaction, rather than from the individual participants, and that knowledge is constructed for both advisor and learner in the interaction.

Woodward-Kron (2007; cf. also Woodward-Kron & Jamieson, 2007) similarly investigated ICs from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), providing a rich analysis of discourse, including joint construction of meaning, scaffolding and addressing a wide range of aspects of textual and contextual features of the learner's text. Woodward-Kron's research provides insights into the range of negotiation taking place in ICs - related to linguistic form and textual organisation on the surface level, to in-depth analysis of the learner's written communication (in content and form), to interpersonal negotiation of the advisor-learner relationship.

Finally, Wilson et al. (2011), in an extension of Collins et al.'s (1998) research, provide what they call an "analytical framework of teacher discourse in one-to-one academic literacy sessions" (p. A151), based on their analysis of an IC. They represent advising practice along two intersecting continua; the first, "literacy focus", draws on Lea & Street's distinction (1998, see above) between a skills focus and a tertiary literacies focus; the second, "pedagogic positioning", distinguishes between didactic and collaborative pedagogy. Based on these distinctions, they argue for "a contingent approach … in which advisers adapt their discourse strategies to meet students' needs as they guide them towards an increasingly independent and critical approach to academic literacy" (p. A151).

In summary, discourse analysis research in learning advising in Australian higher educational settings has drawn on a range of theories and models (e.g., Vygotskian, SFL, tertiary literacies) to investigate advising practice, to provide advisors with an awareness of the range of strategies available to them, and to represent advising as a dynamic context of interaction, requiring various levels of negotiation. Chanock (2007) argues that the effectiveness of ICs is 'invisible' in that it is not possible to objectively link them to learner outcomes; though see Stevenson & Kokkinn (2009) for a comprehensive attempt at IC evaluation. Chanock (2007) also argues that the input from ICs to other forms of learning advising (e.g., workshops and integration of tertiary literacies into faculty curricula) is invaluable, citing one ALL advisor, whose IC program was discontinued: "We no longer see students; therefore we no longer have their version of their problems" (p. A2).

Conclusion

This paper has outlined similarities and differences between academic language and learning advising in the context of Australian higher education, and the field of (language) learning advising, as outlined by Carson & Mynard (2012), in an attempt to explore how these fields might inform each other's development. Both fields draw on similar theoretical and methodological approaches and share a focus on learner autonomy; however, the former privileges the development of tertiary literacies, while the latter privileges the development of language proficiency. In addition, advising practice in the context of Australian higher education is strongly influenced by a constantly evolving national policy framework, which is currently focused on the development of teaching and learning standards and outcomes measurement.

Given the stronger, if not clearly defined, focus on 'English language proficiency' in Australian higher education, the field of *academic language and learning advising* may learn from the burgeoning field of *advising for language learning,* in terms of broadening its focus from the 'academic' to other fields of communication in order to support students' social and professional language and learning-related goals. In the other direction, the field of *advising for language learning* may benefit by drawing on *academic language and learning* research into ICs (outlined above), as well the broader research into the integration of language and learning support into core tertiary studies, involving collaborations among language, learning and discipline specialists, as well as other stakeholders.

Notes

1. The definitions and perspectives here are illustrative of the current discussion in Australian higher education. For a more in-depth discussion of the complexities and history of 'English language proficiency' in language testing in particular, see Chapter 3 of McNamara (1996).

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About the Contributor

Paul Moore works as a lecturer (language specialist) in Learning Development at the University of Wollongong. His work involves a range of activities from student consultation and teaching, to collaboration with teaching staff from a range of faculties, to policy development. Current research interests include discourse analysis, task-based interaction, form-focused instruction and English for specific purposes. Email: paul_moore@live.com

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Investigating Students' Ways to Learn English Outside of Class: A Researchers' Narrative

Howard Doyle, Kochi University, Japan

Michael Parrish, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan

Abstract

This paper provides a summary of a multi-stage research project described through the narratives of the two authors. The research project investigated what students thought were effective (i.e., Good) and less effective (i.e., Bad) ways to learn English. The paper presents some of the main findings of the various components of the studies. One important finding relevant to educators working in self-access centres is that students responding to the open-ended portions of the study did not mention electronic, online or multimedia resources, or self-access learning centres (SALCs). Follow-up closed-response questionnaire findings indicated that students evaluated electronic resources and SALCs positively as good ways to learn outside of class. The authors suggest that a questionnaire-based list of ways to learn English out of class is an effective way to raise students' awareness of alternatives for learners. Subsequent diary studies showed how participants used ideas that were introduced mainly via the questionnaire for their outside class study.

Keywords: awareness-raising, language advising, ways to learn English, autonomous language learning

Language advising practice aims to assist language students to become effective autonomous learners. In order to do this, ideally advisers should be conscious of their students' preferences for, if not experiences with, different ways to learn. Some ways may be considered by learners "Good" – they work or are seen as effective – and some ways may be considered "Bad". There is another set of ways to learn which are characterized as not being in a student's repertoire or even in his or her consciousness.

This is a summary of a multi-phase research project which investigated learners' preferences for learning outside of class, and discovered one approach to raising students' awareness of alternative ways of learning. The shorter-term project started in 2008 as an *ad hoc* study of the ways students choose to learn English outside of class. It subsequently expanded to include an investigation of students' attitudes and consciousness levels regarding traditional ways to learn English outside classrooms, and non-traditional means including electronic media, online resources, and self-access centers.

"Ways to learn" is an expression used throughout this paper, with the terms *good* and *bad* indicating what learners believe to be effective and ineffective ways respectively. The expression was initially drawn from the wording of a diagnostic writing task for students which was the basis for data collection early in the project (see Doyle, 2009a). In similar studies, Malcolm (2004) referred to "ways to improve English" (p. 1), and Pearson (2004), drawing on Bialystok (1981), mentioned "*functional practices*" (p. 1) and referred to "out-of-class language learning behaviour" (p. 2) and "activities" (p. 4). The term *ways* has been maintained by the authors to maintain the integrity of our project and distinguish between learning strategies which may entail conscious planning, cognition and even a rationale.

The paper begins with the narratives and retrospective views of each author in turn. It concludes by discussing how research outcomes may assist the work of language advisers, and finally indicates further directions for research.

Howard's Narrative

The initial study took place in Japan at a small, regional university in 2008. I had to produce a diagnostic tool for a group of 20 motivated intermediate second-year students about to start an intensive English program. Drawing on Breen (1985), I decided that the task should focus on the language-learning context and processes as this represented an authentic and relevant topic for the learners and teachers. The writing prompt was:

What are some Good and Bad ways to learn English out of class?

Suddenly I found myself with 20 pieces of writing which also looked like a convenient set of data to analyze in my role as researcher at the university. This I did, producing a study which was presented in 2008 (see Doyle, 2009a).

What I found was that students preferred and rejected traditional learning approaches in equal measure. Strongest preferences were for easier, leisure-type approaches – listening to music or songs, watching movies with and without subtitles. (These were later categorized "Good

Ways: individual"). Further, another set (categorized "Good Ways: social"), was slightly less popular and included talking to foreigners or people who were good at English. It was clear that these ways to learn were preferred partly because they are less taxing, though less effective unless a language learning plan or regimen is in place.

A second finding was discovered because of an absence in data. There were no mentions of any electronic media, online resources, or SALCs. This was in strong contrast to findings in similar studies, for example, of Chinese learners of English in New Zealand by Pearson (2004) and Arab learners in the Middle East (Malcolm, 2004). The absence of the mention of SALCs was potentially explainable as they are not generally present in Japanese high schools. However, I was surprised to find no mention of technological learning resources in high-tech Japan where I assumed young people were familiar with electronic media applications. A similar trend was observed by Lockley (2011), who noted that Japanese students had access to many types of technology but limited familiarity with their use in an academic context.

A chance to replicate and compare the unexpected findings of the original study with a larger sample occurred the following year. This time I had two classes from whom data was similarly collected in the first half hour of the first lesson. One difference was that this time a Likert-scale questionnaire was constructed and administered as well. The questionnaire drew on open-ended student responses from the initial study among other items. This extra closed-question approach was used in order to triangulate the open-ended data collected in the first instance.

The findings have been described more fully elsewhere (see Doyle, 2009b), but in summary, I found that similar response patterns emerged from the initial open-ended data. More traditional and orthodox ways to learn (or practice) English were mentioned, and, once again, electronic and online media and SALCs did not feature at all. More intriguing were the results of the closed-response questionnaire. Although the opinions about *Good Ways* and *Bad Ways* in the open-ended data correlated with the questionnaire data, electronic media, online resources, and SALCs received significant mention and rated generally better than average this time despite not being mentioned at all in the first open-ended instrument. In all, the Likert-item data showed that the students considered using electronic resources to be Good Ways to learn outside class. A speculative explanation was that the Likert-item instrument worked schematically for respondents. They did not need to access their own memories and consciousness to formulate answers. Rather they just recalled experiences or applied their common sense to make evaluations. A data collection instrument used in a study by Lockley (2011) appears to have worked similarly as a set of extrinsic schematic prompts. Lockley found that students in Information Studies classes in Japan reported varying and extensive use of electronic and information technologies for leisure and study. However, the respondents had been presented with a set of options by the collection instrument itself. From a language advising perspective, a questionnaire could act as an awareness-raising instrument for informing learners of a broader range of ways to learn outside class which could include electronic media, online resources, and SALCs.

However, this did not explain electronic media, online resources, and SALCs being absent from the open-ended response data two years running. I began to speculate about how my students' open-ended preferences reflected their prior learning experiences, from which arguably they drew their notions of "good" and "bad" ways to learn English. The data from the Likert-item instrument appeared to contradict the open-ended data findings with regards to electronic resources and SALCs. A more substantially grounded explanation was needed. In this sense I was not fully convinced of the validity of my own studies.

I wished to investigate different kinds of learners in other locations, in other learning institutions. At that time I had no direct access to nor contact with such institutions. I needed help, so I contacted my erstwhile colleague in a larger university in Kyoto.

Michael's Narrative

When my co-author showed me his two studies (Doyle 2009a, 2009b) and asked for my help, I was curious initially to find how my students preferred to learn and what differences there might be in the students' consciousness of and preferences for various ways of learning between the two universities. I was also conscious of how I might use this information to help me to advise them, in particular regarding learning while studying abroad. Also, like my colleague, I found it odd that his findings showed that none of the students had mentioned online resources, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), or even libraries, language laboratories, or learning centers.

In April and May of 2010, I administered the same data-collection instruments my co-author had used in 2009 to approximately 200 students at two major private universities in Kyoto (see Parrish, 2010 for more details). These learners, too, made no mention of electronic media, online resources, or language resource centres until later prompted by the Likert-item instrument. This discovery was even more baffling in light of the fact that one group had received the questionnaires within one hour of an orientation of their library online resources centre. I conducted the same data collection process again one semester later with higher-level students, and the findings were similar (Parrish, 2010; 2011). My findings strongly resembled those of my co-author's studies.

There was, however, one extra finding that resulted from the second data collection: the higher the level of the student, the greater the repertoire of ways to learn English. Whether it was from experience, motivation, maturity, or aptitude, the positive correlation between language level and repertoire of favoured ways to learn English interested me as a topic of further research. Griffiths (2008) indicated that personal characteristics can lead learners to pursue certain kinds of learning activities. Pearson (2004) also illustrated the variety of ways and the variation between students in terms of learning English outside of class. To explore the question of which ways of learning my students preferred and why, I drew on the experiences of Mahadzir, Ismail and Ramakrishnan (2009). I designed a diary-study project to be conducted as a reflective learning exercise with a group of motivated, upper-intermediate students in a year-long intensive English program at a large, private university in Kansai, Japan.

The diary study found that once students had been introduced to the idea of using electronic or online resources through the Likert-scale survey from the initial studies (among other activities), more students reported using them as part of their English language learning repertoire. The diaries indicated that students watched NHK news online, talked with siblings via Skype, and wrote emails in English. Nevertheless, a majority of students preferred more traditional ways of using English outside of class including studying for norm-referenced, standardized tests of English proficiency such as the TOEIC and TOEFL. A few students showed creativity and resourcefulness in their ways of studying, for example, by talking to themselves in English, thinking about how they might handle a task in their daily lives in English, or singing karaoke in English.

In their diaries, students described how they actually used English rather than listing ways they *should* use English. Students expressed their satisfaction with how they were learning and practicing, but also their frustration. Some of the popular "Good Ways" to learn such as watching DVDs, when they were actually tried, turned out to be more challenging and frustrating than helpful. Though the most recent evolution of the project, diary studies, moves beyond my co-author's original points of interest, reading (in the diaries) what students do to learn English and how they regard these approaches provides valuable insights for me as a language teacher and occasional language advisor.

Conclusions

This research began as an *ad hoc* diagnostic tool for students and evolved into a tool to examine how Japanese EFL students prefer to practice (and hopefully improve) English outside of class. After repeated administration of this survey instrument in different contexts, the results show that students have preferences for certain ways of learning; they develop a repertoire of strategies and activities that work for them, but that does not mean they do not need some guidance. New resources or ways (such as using SALCs or online resources) when brought to students' attention are also seen as viable. Personal choice and enjoyment are important factors, too. The studies indicated that if something is not enjoyable, students are less likely to choose to do it. The diary studies revealed that students had misconceptions about "Good Ways" (such as watching a DVD in English), eventually finding them too difficult. The findings reinforce the need for advising for language learning and the importance of investigating students' needs, interests, and abilities before mediating and negotiating appropriate tasks that they enjoy, and from which they benefit.

Further research should look beyond quantitative identification of students' preferred ways to learn. This may include exploring rationales and other aspects of learners' cognitive behaviour, such as strategising and personalised criteria for successful and unsuccessful language learning. This has already been partially attempted with the diary studies. Further, data collection can expand to focus groups and in-depth individual profiling of learners to view more intrinsic aspects of their learning behaviour as well as including learner populations outside of universities. For educators and students alike, it is helpful to know which ways to learn outside of the class are available and which ones learners actually use.

Notes on the contributors

Howard Doyle is an Associate Professor at Kochi University Department of International Studies in Japan. His current research interests include Ecology of English in the world, Academic Literacies and Discourse Analysis.

Michael Parrish is an Instructor of English as a Foreign Language in the Language Center at Kwansei Gakuin University, Nishinomiya, Japan. He has been teaching foreign languages for 20 years. His current research interests include Early-Childhood Language Development, Literacy Skills Development and Independent Learning.

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Learning Phrasal Verbs Autonomously[1]

Pauline Moore Hanna, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

Abstract

This paper describes the design process of a learning object (LO) for the acquisition of phrasal verbs (PVs) in English, which are a particularly difficult aspect of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for many learners. As such, learners can benefit from the provision of greater opportunities for practice in this area. The PV problem is approached as a semantic rather than a syntactic problem, and so the LO aims to present the learner with contextualized, meaningful practice of PVs with a view to developing independent learning skills. The paper discusses the twin problems of PV use in different language styles (formal vs. informal) and the polysemy of PVs, both of which have been found to contribute directly to learner difficulty (Side, 1990; Dempsey, McCarthy & McNamara, 2007). The way in which the LO attempts to resolve these issues is described in the hope that other materials developers may find them useful.

Keywords: Learning objects, Phrasal Verbs, EFL for Spanish NS, Materials design

The purpose of this paper is to review the process of designing an original learning material designed in a Mexican University for use on a Self-Access Centre (SAC) website. The main objectives are to reflect upon some of the problems involved in learning phrasal verbs (PVs) and to suggest ways in which these problems can be addressed in the design of a learning object (LO) for use by independent learners. PVs are of particular interest for most learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) since they are frequently an evaluation objective. Teachers often set great store by the fluent and appropriate use of PVs, both in speaking and in informal writing, because they are considered typical of native-like usage. Since language learning is a time intensive process and little time is available in the classroom, a research project was carried out in the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México to design learning materials which would complement classroom learning. Given that these independent learners are free as to their choice of materials used, learning materials must be attractive to compete with

[1] The author wishes to thank the editor, Jo Mynard, and two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions which greatly improved this article.

other, commercially produced, learning materials not designed with these learners' specific needs in mind.

The LO described in this review was designed using the eLearning XHTML editor (eXe-learning) (CORE Education, 2004), a freeware developed by a research team from the University of Auckland, the Auckland University of Technology and Tairawhiti Polytechnic. The eXe-Learning editor allows HTML programming in a user friendly format. Once the LO is inserted on a Learning Management System (LMS), the student interface is as shown in Figure 1 which shows the side bar menu of the LO and the introductory module for the PV *come back*:

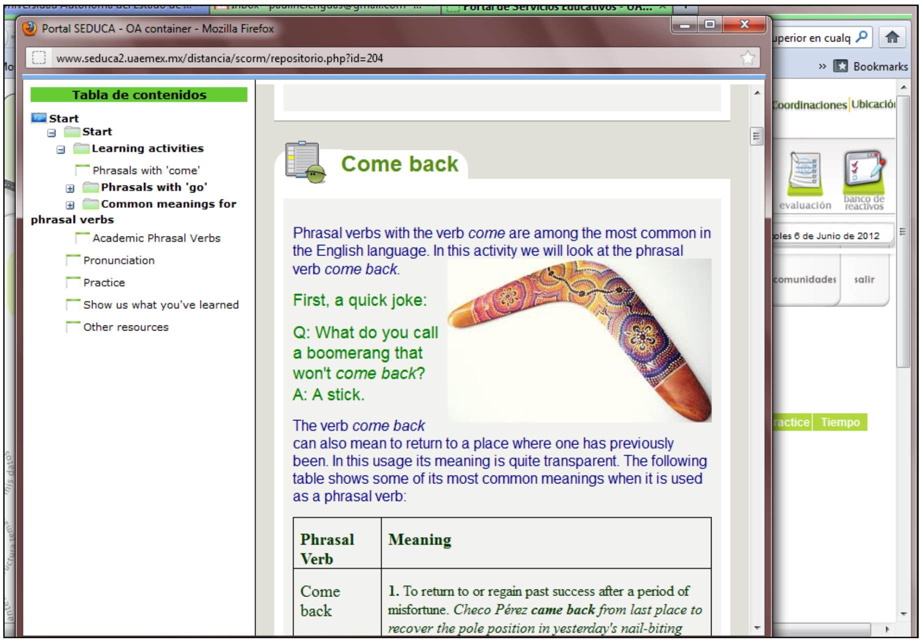

Figure 1: Student view of the LO

The particular strengths of eXe-learning are:

- the production of modules for learning which can then be inserted into a Moodle platform or other LMS to provide guidance for learners throughout the achievement of a particular learning objective.
- the variety of activity types available.
- the flexibility to embed other object types within the main structure, for example, activities in Hot Potatoes (Arneil & Holmes, 1997).
- the ease with which an LO can be assigned technical descriptions via SCORMS (Sharable Content Object Reference Models), a set of standards and specifications for learning objects, which facilitate their reuse in diverse learning environments.

As the target population is independent learners, the overall aim of the unit is not the learning of specific PVs but the development of effective learning strategies to improve the way in which the learning of PVs is approached in the future.

The research team began work by specifying an outline for LOs to allow for the production of a self-contained, instructor-free object to guide and motivate learners through the process of acquiring an objective. The design guidelines include the following four elements:

- An introduction to the topic to set objectives and motivate the student by drawing her attention to the need to learn this particular objective, presented in terms which the learner can readily understand.
- A series of varied practice activities graded from receptive understanding to productive use and from simple to more complex language. Exercises and tasks include audio, video, and written language, and the examples provided constitute authentic language use. To ensure authenticity, examples are to be taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA, Davies, 2008).
- An area with practice activities to allow the student the freedom to produce those forms considered in the learning objective without the pressure of evaluation. These answers will be peer reviewed to introduce motivation for the production of text.
- An area providing evaluation activities, some of which are graded and all of which provide detailed feedback to the learner regarding the errors committed. The feedback for these evaluation activities include direction back to exercises within the LO and outwards to exercises on the Internet which could help improve the learner's performance.

PVs are a notoriously difficult part of learning English as a foreign language, no matter what the learner's native language is. In the case of learners whose native language is Spanish, an important factor in the learning problem is the existence of many verbs with similar meanings derived from Latin, for example, the verb *descend* has a similar meaning to the PV *go down*, while *extinguish* expresses a similar meaning to *put out*. Since these verbs are formally similar to words in the native language (*descender* and *extinguir*) and hence require little learning effort, it seems to the learner that investing energy to learn phrasal verbs which, on the whole, transmit similar meanings is a waste of time. In order to motivate the learner to make this additional effort, she will have to be provided with a good reason.

In the case of PVs in this LO, the motivation provided for learning is associated to the predominant use of PVs in less formal styles of language use. Kida (2011) points out that in more formal situations, more abstract lexicalized language is expected and goes on to state that "colloquial expressions, phrasal verbs and other items that sound too direct cannot be used in formal situations, as they are too 'down-to-earth'" (Kida, 2011, p. 183). This is borne out in the research of Dempsey, McCarthy and McNamara (2007), who confirmed Biber's (1988) finding that PVs are more frequent in informal language. The LO starts with an explanation of this point using phrasal and Latin verbs in parallel sentences in different situations calling for more or less formal styles. For example:

Situation 1: You are leaving your campsite after a weekend camping with friends. Your friend says:
(a) Did you put out the campfire?
(b) Did you extinguish the campfire?

Situation 2: You will hear instructions given to scientists before entering an experimental chamber. Which version is more probable?
(a) Please ensure safety by putting out all naked flames and sources of ignition before going into the experiment chamber.
(b) Please ensure safety by extinguishing all naked flames and sources of ignition before entering the experiment chamber.

The first situation, friends camping together, is quite informal and, correspondingly, 1 (a) is better than 1 (b). In the second, more academic, situation 2 (b) would be considered more appropriate. The use of overly formal vocabulary in informal situations may make the student appear stand-offish and conceited, whereas using informal vocabulary in situations where greater formality is expected will make the student seem less authoritative.

The focus of the LO is on word meaning and the acquisition of PVs is treated as a semantic problem rather than a problem of syntax. One semantic problem identified in the LO is the polysemic nature of PVs, which, like most words, often have a range of possible meanings. For EFL learners this makes them particularly forbidding, since these meanings are not usually retrievable from the meaning of the original verb and the various meanings often seem extremely diverse (Side, 1990). For example, the Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (Cowie & Mackin, 1993) lists the following meanings for the PV *turn out*:

1. Extinguish (sth) (electric) light, (gas, oil) lamp: Make sure all the lights are turned out before you come up to bed.
2. Be present at, attend (sth): A large crowd turned out

3. Develop, progress, in a certain way. She realized that Margot wasn't turning out very well.
4. Empty the contents from (sth), to find sth: But you must have the tickets on you somewhere. Turn out your pockets again
5. Produce, make (sth); develop, train (sb): Why go up to the manager in my own factory and tell him the stuff I'm turning out is shoddy and vulgar?
6. Dress (sb/oneself) smartly etc. She always turns her children out beautifully.

For the learner the array of potential meanings is somewhat overwhelming. The LO shows the learner ways in which to simplify these to more basic meanings that cover various subtypes. For example, in the case of the verb *turn out*, meanings 2, 5 and 6 seem to have an underlying shared meaning of showing up or being produced. The other meanings are more difficult to group, nevertheless, it could be argued that simply asking the learner to look for shared meanings between different subtypes will allow for deeper processing and, hence, more permanent learning of the diverse meanings. Figure 2 shows the first part of an exercise on the PV *come across*, where two basic meanings are identified. This is followed by an exercise in which the student must identify which of the two basic meanings is being used in sentences.

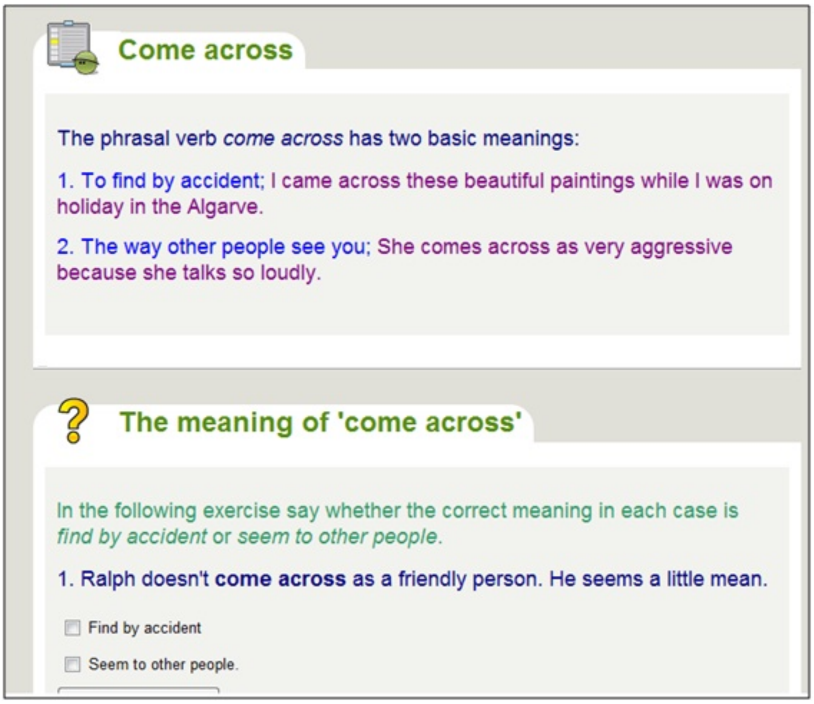

Figure 2: Identification of common meanings for *come across*

After showing various examples to illustrate the process of simplifying subtypes of meaning, reflective activities are introduced where the answer is not given directly in the main text but can be revealed after the student has had an opportunity to attempt a reclassification of her own. These characteristics of activities in Exe-Learning allow the materials designer to overcome the fact that a teacher is not present during the learning process, by allowing her to withhold explanations until the student has made at least one attempt at a classification. Of course, the effectiveness of these activities is dependent on the student's sense of personal ethics, actually making the effort to classify meaning before clicking on the button to reveal the suggested answer. However, since the learner can see that the correct use of the activity is in her best interest and there is no grade for right or wrong answers, one would hope that the instructional design would be respected.

As with all learning materials, decisions must be taken as to the sequencing of the target structures, that is, there must be some principled way to determine which PVs are included in the material and their order of presentation. In this case, the criteria used were the relative frequency of the PV – determined using the list provided in Gardner and Davies (2007) – and its usefulness to illustrate some of the learning strategies proposed. For example the first two units present PVs formed using the verbs *come* and *go*, both of which appear in Gardner and Davies' top ten (2007, p. 139). Choosing these verbs has the additional benefit of their semantic relation as converses, providing an interesting symmetry to the units. In each case, 8 PVs using *come* or *go* with different particles were presented using exercises and learning tasks which reflect the learning strategies discussed above. In all explanations and exercises care was taken to represent authentic language use by choosing examples from COCA.

The second criterion, usefulness for presenting learning strategies, is based on the fact that some particles seem to create PVs with shared meaning. For example, it is often mentioned that PVs with the particle *up* acquire a meaning of telicity (or finished action) (Side, 1990; Sawyer, 2000) for example *eat* means to consume food, whereas *eat up* means to consume some limited quantity of food completely, *drink* is consume liquid, *drink up* is to consume a limited quantity of liquid completely. Once again the argument is that this could provide the learner with a short cut to learning some PVs. The drawback is that not all PVs with *up*, which is perhaps the clearest case of this phenomenon, are actually marked for telicity. This is a rule with exceptions, but nonetheless it does constitute a useful rule for many PVs; any short cut to learning is better than none, and the LO points out that not all PVs with a specific particle generate meaning in exactly the same way. The same is true for the particles *down*, *in,* and *out*, which are also used in the LO to practice this learning strategy.

As Tomlinson (1998) points out SAC materials are frequently designed for ease of feedback, however, this favors the development of activities which can be objectively evaluated, i.e., have one right answer. These are very useful for learners who are right-brained and respond well to analytical work, but not so appropriate for left-brained learners (Tomlinson, 1998; 2010). So a variety of activities were included which allow for freer responses without the immediate pressure of a right answer so that the students could practice the use of phrasal verbs in extended discourse and be more creative, for example, the description of a favorite scene from a movie or a review of a favorite book. Once the LO is inserted to an LMS such as Moodle, these longer answers can be shared via the forum for peer feedback or sent automatically to the coordinator for more detailed feedback.

To summarize, this paper presents specific ways in which some of the problems associated to the learning of PVs in English can be resolved. It is particularly important to ensure that meaning is the central concern throughout the LO and that strategies for independent learning are developed with constant reference to a specific language point, rather than developing learning strategies for their own sake.

Notes on the contributor

Pauline Moore Hanna is a full time professor at the Faculty of Languages in the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México where she teaches Semantics and Pragmatics in the linguistics department. Her areas of professional interest are designing learning materials and developing academic literacy.

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