



The 2011 Pan-SIG Conference Proceedings



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Message from the editors

The 10th Annual Pan-SIG Conference, held at Shinshu University, Matsumoto, Japan over the weekend of May 21st and 22nd, 2010 was a resounding success with teachers and researchers attending from across Japan and a number of other countries. We would especially like to thank Mark Brierley and the conference committee for their efforts, which resulted in a professional, but friendly, atmosphere at the site.

The 2011 Pan-SIG Proceedings may be considered a window onto the conference for those who were unable to attend, or those who would like to revisit a particularly impressive presentation. Collected herein are 20 papers representing the excellent scholarship in evidence at this year's Pan-SIG Conference. We hope you find the papers in this volume as interesting as we have. We are looking forward to working with submissions from presenters at the upcoming 11th Annual Pan-SIG Conference to be held at Hiroshima University on June 16-17, 2012.

Lastly, we wish to dedicate the Proceedings to Mr. Matthew Walsh, who very sadly passed away at far too young an age on October 6th, 2011. Matt was co-editor for the 9th Pan-SIG Conference Proceedings and was slated to have been lead editor of this volume. In addition to being a first-rate teacher-researcher, he was a wonderful human being with a big heart and an infectious smile. He will be missed terribly.

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Fluency development through skill transference

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Abstract

Japanese students studying English find it difficult to achieve a high level of fluency, yet when challenged to improve their abilities in clubs and jobs outside the English classroom, students are generally more willing to apply great effort in learning new skills. In contrast, the average student's attitude towards learning English usually displays much lower levels of motivation and effort. Similar to the development of linguistic fluency, acquiring extra-curricular skills requires the development of a knowledge base, effective strategies, and motivation. This paper examines how successful strategies used to learn extra-curricular activities could potentially be transferred to language learning and also shares an activity in which students considered an extra-curricular activity that they had learned successfully and applied the results to their own English learning.

日本人学生達は、英語学習において高度な流暢さを習得することに対して すぐに限界を覚える。

しかしながら、そんな学生達に限って、課外である普段の生活の場面で英語能力の向上の必要性に直面するとき、「難しい！」と英語講師に気軽に頼ることは容易ではない。他の色々な活動と比較して、英語への進歩は熱意と達成感が欠落している。それは言語の流暢さ、基礎知識の発達を要求する特別教育課程、効果的戦略と熱意に類似する。このプレゼンテーションは～特別教育課程による戦略はどうやって語学学習を潜在的に転進してきたか～を考慮している。

この発表者達は、生徒たちが熟思した成功法にて学習した特別教育課程活動をここで披露します。そして、それらを自己の英語学習成果にご利用下さい。

Keywords: Motivation, skills development, strategies, skills transference

As most teachers in Japan quickly recognize, the majority of Japanese students studying English find it difficult to achieve a high level of fluency. Yet, when challenged to improve their abilities in clubs and jobs outside the English classroom, these students don't resort to the excuse familiar to English teachers: "It's too difficult." Instead, students often devote themselves to their clubs or *bukatsu* wholeheartedly, become highly motivated in these activities and are willing to apply massive amounts of effort. As Cave (2004) notes, school clubs act as effective communities of practice which employ a model of learning similar to apprenticeship. Through constant imitation and repetition, these clubs effectively socialize students into powerful values and behaviour, while simultaneously promoting intense emotional attachment and group spirit. This is the kind of description that most language teachers would like to be able to apply to their own classroom, but students generally show much less motivation in their learning of English than at their clubs.

Apart from motivation, the sheer amount of effort that students apply to their clubs or part-time jobs is clearly responsible for the acquisition of skills in these extracurricular activities and would facilitate a much higher level of fluency if it were applied to language learning. While teachers recognize this, it is clear that students also realize this themselves, for as has been pointed out by Brown (2003) and others, Japanese students believe that achievement is caused by effort and only minimally by ability.

Bukatsu is not the only extra-curricular activity where we see this phenomenon of high motivation and high effort outside the classroom. A similar amount of motivation and applied effort is also apparent in students' part-time jobs. In our language classrooms, we have many students who work two or three different part-time jobs which total up to 20 hours per week. While the money earned from these jobs is undeniably important, the students also report much greater satisfaction from part-time jobs than from their study. Again, we see huge effort and motivation toward extra-curricular activities that is not usually shown in the language classroom.

It is perhaps not only language classes that suffer from this lack of motivation and effort. Indeed, a simple walk down the corridors of a Japanese school or university and a look through the classroom door or windows will quickly reveal that many

students are asleep during classes and that the teacher carries on as if this were perfectly normal. In contrast, a walk beside the sports ground or the archery ground, or meeting a student at their part-time job, quickly reveals that students are wide-awake and active. So in most cases, it is not just the language class that is the problem, but rather the different environments of the curriculum and the extra-curricular activities. Indeed, English is generally rated higher than other subjects in surveys at our universities, so while the problem is less about language learning than about studying in general, the discussion in this paper will keep the discussion within the limits of EFL.

Similar to the development of linguistic fluency, acquiring extra-curricular skills in part-time jobs or in clubs requires the development of a knowledge base, effective strategies, and motivation. This paper examines how successful the way of thinking and learning that is used in learning extra-curricular activities could potentially be transferred to language learning. We also share an activity in which students thought about an extra-curricular activity that they had learned successfully and then applied the results to their own English learning.

Rationale

Much of our thinking in this paper has been influenced by the field of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), which suggests that the way of learning one skill, i.e. a learning strategy, may be transferable to learning another skill (e.g. Dilts, 1998). By examining the *process* of how a skill is learned, rather than just the ‘content,’ NLP suggests that it is possible to ‘model’ that learning process and then apply that process or learning strategy to other things that a person wants to learn.

While we often look at the problems that students face in the classroom and take a remedial approach to teaching, NLP also suggests that it is more useful to look at how excellent performers succeed, rather than looking at how people are failing. In the field of ELT, this assumption was explored in great depth by Rubin (1975) in a study of what constitutes a *good language learner*. One of Rubin’s important findings was that good language learners are willing to experiment with different learning methods, and then choose those that work best for them. The good language learner also notices how other people learn the language and try out their methods to see if they are effective for them. Through the activity presented in this paper, students in our classrooms got opportunities to hear about other learning styles and to think about their own learning

styles outside the language classroom, subsequently opening themselves up to the possibility of different learning methods.

People use different approaches in learning a skill successfully compared to when they learn something less successfully. Thinking about these learning strategies is a type of meta-cognition activity which can help students to realize how success in one area of their lives may be transferable to other areas of their lives. More specifically, thinking about the best ways to learn English can help our students to achieve higher levels of fluency.

Our approach differs to Rubin in one important aspect. She aimed to distill the characteristics of the good language learner by examining a large number of students who achieved success. While this is an extremely valuable approach and one which has resulted in important findings, NLP is interested in the subjective nature of reality. In other words, while successful learners of a language can certainly share characteristics, it is the successful learning style of the *individual* learner that will be most effective for that person. One simple example is that one learner might be primarily visual and learn well through pictures or looking at someone else doing a task. Another learner could be primarily auditory and learn best by listening to instructions. By identifying the nature of their personal successful learning strategies, a learner is able to potentially tap in to exactly how they can learn best in any situation.

Activity design

Based on earlier research into successful learning (Cullen, 2009) and some ideas from the field of NLP, we started out with three basic questions (1-3). As we prepared and carried out preliminary piloting, other important issues emerged and these were also included in the activity. These issues and related questions are shown in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Issues and questions used to focus meta-cognition

Meta-Cognition Focus	Example Question
<i>What do you need to know?</i>	1. What information do you need to learn?
<i>How do you do it?</i>	2. What skills do you need to learn?
<i>Who are you in that situation?</i>	3. What personal characteristics do you need to learn it?
<i>Using what?</i>	4. What resources do you need? Time, money, friends, books, software, ...?
<i>Why?</i>	5. What was your motivation? Extrinsic or intrinsic?
<i>What's the evidence?</i>	6. How did you know that you had learned successfully? Someone else told you? You felt it yourself?
<i>How long?</i>	7. How much time did it take?
<i>What feedback while learning?</i>	8. How did you feel?

Carrying out the activities

In the sections below, we discuss the activities that we carried out with students to help them to perform this meta-cognition which allowed them to become more aware of their own personal learning styles. Subsequently, they could later apply this learning style to the study and acquisition of English. We carried out these activities with a total of 264 students at two universities. The students were a mixture of English majors and non-English majors and proficiency in English ranged from very low to very high.

Step 1. Thinking about learning an extra-curricular activity successfully

To show students what we wanted to do, we started out by explaining something that we had learned successfully. Table 2 gives the example of learning to play the guitar.

Table 2. Teacher example of learning successfully

What is something you learned successfully: <u>Playing the guitar</u>	
When did you learn it? <u>16 years old (and I'm still learning!)</u>	
1. What <u>information/knowledge</u> did you need to learn?	Chord shapes; fingerpicking patterns; chord patterns for songs that I wanted to play; the names of each guitar string
2. What <u>skills</u> did you need to learn?	Holding the guitar; Making chords; how to hold and use a pick; keeping rhythm: stringing a guitar; tuning a guitar; bending notes; sliding; barre chords, etc.
3. What personal <u>characteristics</u> did you need to learn it?	Patience; hard work; a love of music
4. What other resources did you have to learn it?	I had time because I wasn't working; Many of my friends played and taught me riffs; I had books; tapes to listen to and copy; I had enough money to buy a guitar.
5. What was your motivation for learning it?	It was fun; my friends were playing too; I love music.
6. How did you <u>know</u> that you had learned it successfully?	My friends and family enjoyed hearing me play. I could play more songs than before. I got paid to play in bars.
7. How much time did it take to learn it?	When I was in university, I practiced several hours a day. I played at every chance available. It took me years to feel that I was good. I am still improving.
8. How did you feel <u>while</u> you were learning?	It was always fun for me.

After explaining our own example of “Learning Successfully” (guitar playing), we gave the “Learning Successfully” handout to students and asked them to think about something that they had learned successfully outside the classroom, such as a club

activity, a sport, a hobby, or a part-time job. In order to carry it out as a useful language-learning activity as well as a useful meta-cognition activity, we gave students some time to think about the questions and then we had them form pairs to interview a partner and write down their partner's answers. The students then shared the results with the whole class or in groups. The questions were the same as those shown in Table 2.

Step 2. Thinking about learning English successfully

The next step was to have students think about learning *English* successfully. This was carried out in the following lesson in most cases. For the “Learning English Successfully” activity, the questions were phrased as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Learning English Successfully

1. What information/knowledge do you need to learn English?	
2. What skills do you need to learn?	
3. What personal characteristics do you need to learn English?	
4. What other resources do you have to learn English?	
5. What is your motivation for learning English?	
6. How will you know that you have learned English successfully?	
7. How much time does it take to learn English?	
8. How do you feel while you are learning English?	

Again, the activity was carried out in pair interviews, and the students later shared their results in groups and with the whole class. For several higher level classes, we also

asked students to do a further meta-cognition activity by writing 200 words of advice for someone else on how to learn English. These advice papers were posted on the walls of the classroom, and the students spent some time with a pen and notebook, writing down the advice that their peers had shared.

Preliminary results

At this point in time, we consider this research to be a pilot study and not all the data has yet been analyzed. However, some interesting preliminary results have already emerged and these are outlined below.

- Lower-level learners generally chose sports as the activity at which they were successful. In contrast, many higher-level learners chose other activities such as cooking or musical instruments. Out of the total number of students (n=264), the highest number of learners (49%) considered that they had achieved successful learning in a sport. This was followed by a musical instrument (21%) and cooking (9%).
- Other examples of successfully learned activities were quite diverse and included English speech contest, housework, walking by hands, dancing, chemistry and biology, selling cakes, tea ceremony, ballet, and calligraphy.
- The students really enjoyed the activity and apart from its meta-cognitive value in raising awareness of personal learning style, it is clearly a motivational activity which generated a lot of active and engaged language use.
- Learning was generally stated to be more successful when an activity was considered to be fun or intrinsically motivating. “Hard” is acceptable when the level of fun is high. To a large extent, this explains the motivation and effort exerted in clubs and jobs, and adds weight to the argument that language classrooms need to be intrinsically motivating.
- Although we have not fully analyzed the data, metacognition about another successful activity appears to have been very useful because it was clear that students were referring to the previous successfully-learned activity when they started thinking about learning English successfully.
- Sharing ideas in group discussion was very useful and helped students to become more aware of other learning styles.
- Higher level English speakers were better able to describe how they achieved success. The lower level students, in turn, could gain insight into their higher level

peers' ability to achieve successful language learning and begin to see it as something they could model. This supports the assumption of NLP that we may need to ask excellent performers of a skill in order to get useful responses.

The 200 word essays written by the higher level students were also useful and provided good advice for learning English.

- “Learn lots of vocabulary.” (very common response)
- “Practice grammar thoroughly.”
- “Practice your pronunciation.”
- “Be active and positive.”
- “Have curiosity.”
- “Be patient.”
- “Talk with other people in English.”
- “Overcome embarrassment.”
- “Making mistakes is natural.”
- “Watch foreign films.”
- “Enjoy English to learn English (if you hate it, you won’t improve).”
- “Grammar can be dull, so watch a movie or choose your favourite English book.”
- “Search the Internet for your favourite musician’s lyrics – you can learn informal English.”
- “When I learned tea ceremony, I had to learn the names of objects first. These were the basics. I had to do the same for English. Learn the basics. Without knowing the basics, you cannot start anything. For tea ceremony, I needed patience and a love of Japanese culture. I needed the same for English. The most important thing is having an interest.”
- “No matter how much you love English, you will feel disgusted or a lack of confidence at least once. It takes a long time. You cannot become good at English all at once.”
- “You need to have good supporters, for example, your friends and teachers. With your supporters, you can keep on.”
- “Listen to the radio in English or read *The Japan Times*.”
- “You need resources plus personal characteristics.”

- "Study English every day."
- "Find a place where you can speak English."
- "Your memories while you were in a foreign country may be useful to motivate you to continue learning English."
- "You have to repeat your learning many times."
- "Make a suitable environment and prepare necessary things such as text books or dictionaries in order to learn English. Suitable environment means a place where you can concentrate on studying."
- "Keep up your motivation to improve your English skills."
- "I think vocabulary is the most important thing to learn because if you have perfect grammar or your reading speed was very fast, without vocabulary you still couldn't understand what sentences mean."
- "Depends on which one you want to learn, speaking fluently or writing in proper grammar, how you have to study will be different."
- "When I get tired of studying English, I watch dvds in English to get confidence and to be eager to study again. Just have fun continuously, and don't be shy to speak English."
- "Finally, English is English, it is actually impossible to translate English into Japanese so just feel English as English then it will be easier to learn it."
- "If you want to be able to speak fluently, the best way is to go to a country where people speak English."

Improvements to the Pilot Study

In the process of carrying out this study and while sharing it with participants at the conference, it became clear that the current research can be improved in various ways, and we plan to carry out the study again in an improved form.

- It has become clear that learning is context-dependent and that the environment needs to be specified, so it would be useful to add a question such as: "where did you learn it, who did you learn it with?"
- Many students followed the teacher example too closely and gave a musical instrument as their successfully-learned activity. Others followed the oral suggestion of a sport. In order to encourage a wider range of fields in which successful learning might have taken place, in future we plan to give a better list of sample skills (written as well

as explained orally). These could be drawn from the “Other” student examples in this pilot study.

- In order to extend the meta-cognition, students could also be asked to elicit a skill that they failed to learn and notice the differences between the answers. This does not match the NLP idea of looking at successful exemplars of a skill, but could certainly provide insight.
- Some students explained how feedback was useful to them as part of the learning process and it may be useful to add a question asking what specific kinds of feedback was useful to them when they learned successfully.
- In this study, although the questions in the *learning successfully* activity and the *learning English* activity were very similar, in future it would be useful to make more explicit links between learning the extracurricular activity and learning English. For example, students could identify similarities and differences between the two activities and determine what could usefully be applied to the situation of learning English.
- Currently there is considerable research being carried out into *Can Do* statements, and this activity could potentially be linked to one of the *Can Do* frameworks.
- Since this activity was used as a language-learning activity as well as a meta-cognition awareness-raising activity, we carried it out entirely in L2. However, the meta-cognition part of the activity could probably be improved by adding L1 brainstorming in order to generate richer ideas.
- While the length of the activity needs to be kept fairly short, some additional questions which could be included are:
 - What did you do to maintain the skill in the activity over time?
 - How did you change as a result of learning this activity successfully?

Conclusion

This study has been a preliminary attempt to apply some of the ideas of NLP and meta-cognition to the Japanese EFL classroom, particularly in identifying useful learning strategies by modelling the success students have with their extra-curricular activities. It has shown great promise and we plan to investigate this area further. We would like to thank the participants at the PanSig conference for their thought-inspiring

feedback and we welcome any further feedback on this paper from researchers or teachers who would like to develop this idea further. Feel free to use this activity in your own classroom environment. Your feedback after the activity would be much appreciated. Both authors can be contacted at the e-mail addresses provided at the end of this paper.

Biodata

Dr. Brian Cullen is an associate professor at Nagoya Institute of Technology. He has authored and edited many EFL textbooks and research articles. His current research interests include learner autonomy, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), materials design, and L2 creativity. He is a master practitioner and trainer of NLP. More information is available at <www.briancullen.net>.

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