

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Autoethnographic Study of Japanese Pedagogy: A Multilingual Learner's Experience in Learning Japanese

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This autoethnographic study involved the author in the dual role of researcher and informant and analyzes her Japanese learning experience in four programs across three countries. The goal of the paper is to proffer the current practice in Japanese language classrooms with an array of pedagogical options through a review of how the class activities in question accommodated the author's learning process.

Keywords: Autoethnography; second language acquisition; Japanese learning

Do learners approach their learning following the pathway that their teachers steer them to? This question is often answered from teachers' perspective through research conducted by language educators. These studies, for example, measure the effect of an instructional approach on student learning (e.g., Horiba, 2012; Leis, Cooke, & Tohei, 2015; Mori, Omori, & Sato, 2016) and compare the responses on questionnaires that are designed by teacher-researchers to survey learners' perception of teachers' pedagogical approaches (e.g., Savignon & Wang, 2003; Siegel, 2013). Analyses of teaching approaches and implications for classroom practice from teachers' perspective offer insightful information on how language educators value the implementation of and rationales for their pedagogical choices. In addition, interpreted survey data on learners' perception measured by teaching-learning-related items written from educator-researchers' viewpoint can help researchers study ways and the extent to which teaching and learning interact in language classrooms. Research that revolves around instructors' and researchers' standpoints is essential; however, are teachers' perspectives of student learning alone sufficient to decide which teaching approaches work better than the others for learners? Do students and teachers always share the same stance on instructional activities? If they do not, then what is equally insightful for research in language pedagogy is analytical, qualitative information that is directly contributed by learners with regard to how they process and evaluate their classroom experiences.

According to Brown's (2009) research findings, there were disparate notions of effective teaching between teachers and students. In the study, the students favored a grammar-based approach, whereas their teachers preferred a more communicative method that involved target

language use, error correction, and group work. Such significant discrepancies between instructor and learner beliefs in several relevant pedagogical areas show that teachers' perspectives alone of how teaching should be done is insufficient to account for how learning actually takes place on the learner's end. The intersection of the two sets of beliefs about language learning has ramifications indicative of an urgent need for language educators to proactively seek out their students' positions on areas beyond what preset questionnaire items can shed light on and to engage them in discussions about the landscape of the learning paradigm in the classroom. Research studies, including the current one, aiming to investigate how learners operate within the parameters of their teachers' choices is important because, as Schulz (1996) argues, mismatches between instructors' and learners' understanding of what pedagogical approaches benefit learning can unfavorably affect learners' satisfaction with the language learning experience. Thus, as Schulz recommends, researchers and teachers are urged to make efforts to develop a fit between language educators' and their learners' expectations of classroom practice in an attempt to establish pedagogical credibility and motivate their learners to commit to and involve in effective learning.

As such, it is imperative to find out if students navigate through language learning in the process intended by their teachers to direct them to from learners' outlook in addition to teachers' perspective on language learning. However, few studies have offered learners' in-depth synthesized information on ways teachers' chosen pedagogical practices affect their learning process and results. In light of a paucity of studies in learners' views on Japanese pedagogy, the author, a learner of Japanese and a researcher in foreign language education, introduces, analyzes, and compares the characteristics of four Japanese language programs across three countries based on her first-hand learning experiences in these programs, research in second language acquisition, and field work in teacher education. This article aims to offer Japanese language educators and program administrators a learner's perspective on teaching and learning Japanese and to contribute knowledge to further understand the discrepancy, if any, between what a learner learns and what teachers intend to teach. To that end, four language programs that the author attended are compared for their curriculum designs, teaching approaches, and yielded learning results. While the author is a foreign language educator, the article is written based on her experiences as a student in class. That is to say, for example, a lesson plan informs pedagogical theories and makes sense to the author as a teaching professional in retrospect may not have been understood the same way by the author back then as a learner, and vice versa.

Autoethnographic method was adopted as the research method in this study. The descriptions and analyses of the programs are constructed based on the author's participation in the programs, self-observation, retrospective journals, the class notes, the syllabi, the textbooks, and other related materials obtained during her enrollments in the programs. One of the four Japanese language programs in question was in Taiwan, two in the United States, and one in Japan. Three out the four programs were housed within a college department, and one was a private learning institution. These programs shared things in common, such as effectiveness in their instruction, and differed in a number of ways in teaching practice, which shows readers a variety of pedagogical options to approach Japanese language teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

How do second language (L2) learners develop knowledge of the rules and items and then employ their L2 knowledge in actual language use? How do L2 learners understand their learning process? The current study, informed by Gass's (1988) cognitive theoretical framework, adopts an autoethnographic research method to investigate acquisition and procedural ability of Japanese as a foreign and then second language from a learner's standpoint through an examination of the pedagogical approaches that the author experienced in the four language programs in question.

In this framework, receiving input is the departure point for second language acquisition (SLA) to take place. The portion of input that is noticed and comprehensible to L2 learners can become intake, which, according to Chaudron (1985), is considered as a process in which the learner's internalized set of rules communicates with target language input. During this cognitive process, based on Gass's theoretical framework, the comprehended input becomes implicit knowledge if the new L2 information has been integrated into the learner's current L2 knowledge. The part of comprehended input that is not yet ready to be integrated into the interlanguage system feeds into the explicit knowledge component, which, according to Krashen's Monitor Theory (1991), can be accessed by L2 learners to monitor their output when learners are focused on form and have sufficient time to retrieve the explicit knowledge. To better understand the ramifications of Gass's (1988) SLA theoretical framework on the current study, this section will review cognitive accounts of SLA theories that advance the notions of noticing and consciousness, comprehensive input and interaction, the Monitor Theory, implicit and explicit knowledge, and output.

How L2 Learning is Viewed with Cognitive Approaches

Mitchell and Myles (2004), cognitive theorists, consider second language learning (SLL) as a complex processing system that learners operate in similar ways they approach other kinds of learning. Namely, language might not be seen as a separate innate module in cognitive approach, which is unlike Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 2015), whose proponents view learning language distinct from other types of learning. Cognitive accounts of SLA view SLL as a process that involves attentional manipulation, repeated activation, internalization, and automatization of linguistic information and skills. This cognitive view is important to the current study because the observed pedagogical approaches, classroom activities, and the author's SLL in the four programs are consistent with the notions enhanced in cognitive accounts of SLA. The L2 learning process in a cognitive theory is similar to, for instance, how one learns to paint, an undertaking that requires learning about the skills and practicing the skills. In SLL, as Wray (2002) states, L2 learners often start with memorized phrases in chunks (e.g., 一生懸命 勉強しなければなりません [must study with the utmost effort for dear life]), and through practices they gradually become able to analyze constituents (e.g., 一生懸命 [utmost effort for dear life]; 勉強する [to study]; なければなりません [must]) to bring about applicable rules. As will be shown in the Method section, SLL is observed to be a cognitive process in a number of learning occasions where the author developed automaticity in her language use through repeated practices in mechanical drills and applications. Subsequently, based on McLaughlin's observation, "as performance improves, there is constant restructuring as learners simplify,

unify, and gain increasing control over their internal representations” (1995, p. 134). This observation describes the intake process in Gass’s (1988) theoretical framework for SLA, which lays the conceptual foundation for the current study.

What new information do L2 learners notice in target language input?

In the author’s SLL experience, new words, phrases, grammar, idioms, and concepts in the L2 are noticed when the new information is embedded in and supported by a generally understandable context. The following example of this notion is a conversation between a college professor, who is a non-native speaker of English, and an American college student.

Professor: Who would like to take the 8:00 am time slot for the final spoken exam?

Student: All right, I will take the “L” for the team.

(the whole class laughed and cheered.)

Professor: So, you mean you *will* take your final exam at 8:00.

Student: Yes, I will.

Professor: Okay, what does “L” mean? Unwanted things?

Student: It means “loss.”

Professor: So next time when I volunteer to do something in an effort to spare others, I can say “I will take the L”?

Students: Yes! You got it.

The college professor in the dialogue was able to easily notice and identify the unknown component, make a logical guess, and internalize the new information, and, according to Gass’s (1988) theoretical framework for SLA, it is primarily because the professor had comprehended the rest of the conversation and the context that accompanied the unsure part. This observation is supported by the notion of “noticing the gap” by Schmidt and Frota (1986), which argues that for L2 learners to notice the unknown element in the input and then intake the information, learners need to be able to compare what they have become aware of in the input and what they themselves are typically capable of producing based on their existing interlanguage system. This “noticing the gap” notion shares a similar concept with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1999), which states that L2 learners progress through the natural order in L2 development by comprehending input that consists of structures one step beyond their current level of L2 competence. In the example above, the unknown word “L” was presented along with other comprehensible material; therefore, as the “noticing the gap” notion and Input Hypothesis predict, the professor was able to learn this new use of “L.”

However, not every input can be noticed or comprehended in the SSL process, such as the situation in which the amount of or complexity in new information in the input is more than what L2 learners can handle. What can L2 instructors do for their learners when the gap is too wide and the input is many steps ahead of learners’ current competence?

How is input made comprehensible for L2 learners?

In Gass's (1988) theoretical framework, for L2 learning to take place, input needs to be noticed and comprehensible, and there are pedagogical tactics that can make input comprehensible in an effort for L2 learners to move along to the intake stage in the framework.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1991) and Long's (1983) interactional approach can explain how input can be made comprehensible and how it works in relation to SLA. Input is defined by Long (1983) as "the linguistic forms (morphemes, words, utterances)—the streams of speech in the air—directed at the non-native speaker" (p.127). Krashen's input hypothesis (1991) states that L2 input has to be comprehensible and at one step ahead of the learner's current linguistic competence (i+1) in order for SLA to happen. Input can become comprehensible through simplification with help of extralinguistic and contextual clues. An added condition is that L2 learners must be affectively disposed to receive the input they comprehend; that is, in Krashen's terms, learners' affective filter needs to be low. Long also considers comprehensible input as a necessary condition and further stresses the important role of interaction in making input comprehensible. During communication, conversational tactics, such as clarification request and recast, are often used to help L2 learners negotiate meaning, enhance comprehension, and acquire language skills. Larsen-Freeman and Long state (2016):

Modification of the interactional structure of conversation... is a better candidate for a necessary (not sufficient) condition for acquisition. The role it plays in negotiation for meaning helps to make input comprehensible while still containing unknown linguistic elements, and, hence, potential intake for acquisition (p.144).

In the current study, SLL often took place during role-plays when the author negotiated meanings to clarify her intention and when reformulations of faculty utterances were offered to the author with indirect correctional recasts. Such interactions, according to Long (1983), contain not only positive but also negative language evidence that can lead to SLA. An example is as follows.

The author (student): 座っていい。

Professor: 座っていいですか。

The author (student): すみません。座っていいですか。

Professor: はい、どうぞ。

The author (student): ちょっと質問がありますが、明日、聴解力試験は何時ですか。

[The author (student): can I sit down?

Professor: May I please sit down?

The author (student): I am sorry. May I please sit down?

Professor: Yes, please.

The author (student): I just have a question. What time is our listening test tomorrow?

The example above shows how Long's interactional input can result in intake in Gass's (1988) cognitive framework. Once the input is comprehended and turned into intake, according to Krashen's Monitor Theory (1991), part of the intake becomes implicit knowledge, and the other joins learners' explicit knowledge, which can monitor the grammaticality of L2 learners' output.

What L2 knowledge is readily available for learners to use in communication and what is not?

The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge underlies Krashen's Monitor Theory, which sheds light on the stage of intake in Gass's (1988) framework of SLA. Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that is at learners' disposal as a conscious presentation and allows learners, for example, to explain the error in sentence like "the New York City is where I visited last month" by indicating "the" is not used before a proper noun. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, refers to knowledge that has been internalized and, therefore, is intuitive and largely hidden. Unlike with explicit knowledge, L2 learners are not conscious of what implicit knowledge they know, and such intuitive knowledge becomes manifest only in their actual output, which is the last step in Gass's (1988) theoretical framework.

Krashen's (1991) Monitor Theory argues that L2 learners possess two separate systems, acquired and learned, to mediate between intake and output. The acquired system consists of implicit knowledge and is developed through a subconscious process of acquisition, which arises when learners are using language for communication. The learned system is a result of a conscious learning process, in which learners' attention is directed to L2 rules and explicit knowledge development. Krashen states that when L2 learners communicate with others, the implicit knowledge in their acquired system initiates and sustains the utterances, whereas the learned system monitors the form of output if L2 learners have sufficient time to access their explicit knowledge. An example of the Monitor Theory a conversation below between L2 learner of English and a native speaker of English.

Native speaker: Do you think I made the right decision?

L2 learner: I am not sure...if I were you, I probably wouldn't do it.

Native speaker: What would you have done then?

L2 learner: I meant, if I had been you, I wouldn't have done it. I would have just asked him to leave.

The L2 learner in the example above was communicative, owing to his implicit, intuitive knowledge in the acquired system, but he made a mistake in the use of subjunctive voice in the first utterance. However, as the learner's learned system monitored the conversation and the learner had a moment to resort to his explicit knowledge, he paid attention to the form and corrected himself. Based on Krashen's Monitor Theory and Gass's (1988) theoretical framework of SLA, once input is comprehended and becomes intake, it is incorporated into two knowledge systems, implicit and explicit, to support L2 learners' output. In this framework, implicit knowledge is readily accessible for getting meaning across, whereas explicit knowledge functions as a monitor to support accuracy of the form in utterances. More examples that display how Monitor Theory works in relation to the stages of intake and output are described in the observation of the Program B in the Method section.

What is the role of output in SLA?

Krashen's Input hypothesis (1999) maintains that comprehensive input is sufficient for L2 learners to develop their all-around interlanguage and that output is a result of acquisition,

instead of a cause for acquisition. Responding to Input hypothesis, Swain (1995) points out that while L2 learners can often succeed in comprehending semantic aspect of the L2 materials through being exposed to comprehensive input, input is not enough for individuals who desire to speak or write at a higher level. Swain's Output hypothesis states that only L2 production can force learners to engage in grammatical processing and effectively develop L2 syntax and morphology, which illustrates the last step in Gass's (1988) framework. For example, during the stage of intake in the framework, the author was able to comprehend 行きそう [to likely go to] as in 彼女が行きそうな店です [This is a shop where she probably likes to go to]. However, she only became aware that the use of いきそう in the sentence *田中さんは今週末ドイツに行きそうです [* Mr. Tanaka is likely going to Germany this weekend] was problematic when she was outputting the sentence as she actively processed the syntax, created the erroneous sentence, and got corrected. In a learning situation like the above, L2 learners learn from not only mistakes per se but more importantly from the process of constructing and then outputting them. Therefore, outputting, as Gass's (1988) theoretical framework of SLA puts, is a significant step to contribute to SLL.

According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), the importance of focus-on-form can also be understood from a developing idea that how much the learner notices matters of form may affect the extent to which unfamiliar information in L2 input and during interactions can potentially become incorporated into the learner's developing L2 system. Richard Schimidt (1988) is another influential researcher in promoting the enhancement in L2 learners' attention paid to forms, and his comment on his own learning of Portuguese is "I heard them (*É que* variants of question words) and processed them for meaning from the beginning, but did not notice the form for five months. When I finally did notice the form, I began to use" (p. 141). The author had a similar experience in being able to process only the meaning of 敬語 [the honorific form] but not its form. For instance, the comprehension of 部長 [manager] was sufficient for the author to process the semantic meaning of the honorifics inflection of 出席されます [to attend in your honor] in 部長は来週の会議に出席されます [Next week the manager will attend the meeting in your honor]. However, it was not until the author's attention was intentionally directed to the two respective honorific forms of 出席されます [to attend in your honor] and ご出席になります [to attend in your honor] in class that she became able to use both of the forms in addition to understanding their meaning. Both the notions above from Mitchell and Myles and Schmidt shed light on how L2 learners begin with processing semantic meanings, experience form-noticing, and become able to output utterances in the end. Swain (1995) adds that in order for L2 learners to attain full grammatical competence, they need the output opportunity for meaning use of their linguistic knowledge. It is because L2 learners would be pushed into making their utterances more comprehensible, precise, and accurate when they experience communication breakdowns during the stage of output in Gass's (1988) framework of SLA. In addition, resonant with Schmidt, Swain argues that output can motivate L2 learners to move from a top-down approach to comprehend the semantic aspect of input to a bottom-up process to attend to their syntactic forms.

What is Autoethnography as a Research Method?

Chang (2008) defines autoethnography as an inquiry approach that is "ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its

content orientation” (p. 48). Ellis & Bochner (2000) points out an important mission of autoethnography being creation of a linkage to connect “the personal to the cultural” (p.739). Chang states autoethnography aims an understanding of self and others through critical analyses and interpretation of autobiographic data and a self-examination within its culture and further “pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences” (p.49). This autoethnographic method was utilized because it allowed the author the privilege with access to in-depth data that were collected over a course of eighteen years and a comprehensive and intimate perspective to holistically reflect on the interconnectivity of herself and the learning contexts in question. In addition, in light of the notion that autoethnography “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research” (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, para. 3), the author was able to retrospectively weave personal experiences into the thick fabric of the cultures to construct a learner’s analytical viewpoint of her Japanese language learning to make contribution to the scholarly field of Japanese pedagogy. Such personally evocative writing style tends to engage readers in a friendlier way than a conventional scholarly genre, as stated by Nash (2004), “scholarly personal narratives” liberate researchers from abstract, impersonal writings and “touch readers’ lives by informing their experiences” (p. 28). In this study, the author is true to her vision, value, and interpretation of her lived experiences of interaction and participation in an intimate and immediate “eyewitness account” (Cauley, 2008, p.442).

METHOD

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to offer a learner’s in-depth view of Japanese pedagogy with reference to Gass’s (1988) theoretical framework of SLA and through systematic analyses of four Japanese language programs based on the author’s autobiographical experiences as a learner in these programs. The present study thus employed an autoethnographic inquiry method, which explores subjective, interactive, introspective performances in “a tangle of cultural, social, and historical situations and relations in contact zones” (Brodkey, 1996, p. 29). Following this approach, the four programs are described and analyzed in their cultural learning contexts in a chronological order of the author’s enrollments. The filed data were collected by means of the author’s participation in the learning, self-observation, and a review of the learning-related materials. The teaching and learning data were reviewed, categorized by the primary instructional focus (i.e., vocabulary, grammar, speaking and listening, and reading), and then analyzed to investigate how and when SLA took place based on Gass’s (1988) framework of SLA. The data obtained over a course of eighteen years were also cross-referenced with available online information about the four programs in question for fact check. The author retrospectively described her past Japanese learning experiences and organized them using hindsight without living through them with an intention to make them part of the research project. Due to this very nature of a qualitative autoethnographic inquiry, there is no preset research question but the goal to guide the current studies. The description of each program starts with background information and continues with the four areas of instructional activities: vocabulary, grammar, speaking and listening, and reading. These four areas were selected because these were the commonly shared areas of learning activities cross the four programs.

Conducting the current autoethnographic research, the author aimed to study the culture's relational pedagogical practices and values for the purpose of helping insiders, who are cultural members of Japanese instruction, understand perspective of outsiders, who are strangers to the culture. In addition to use autoethnography as a methodological tool, the author compared and contrasted her personal experience against the current theories in SLA. The author acknowledges that her relative outsider's perspective can offer interpretative angles that might not be available to the insiders of the Japanese instructional culture and that an autoethnographic approach can appeal to readers for its reader-friendliness (Chang, 2008) because it honors "one's unique voicing—complete with colloquialisms, reverberations from multiple relationships, and emotional expressiveness" (Gergen & Gergen, 2002, p.14). With the object of maximizing its effects mentioned above and minimizing the potential pitfalls in autoethnography (Chang, 2008), the author followed the TESOL guidelines (2017) and practiced reflexivity in an attempt to examine and disclose her own background, identify, and subjectivity and their influences on the data collection and interpretation and made effort not to stereotype, essentialize, or generalize the teaching culture of Japanese as a foreign or second language with an understanding that a critical interpretation needs to embody the culture in all its complexity, instability, and diversity. Thus, the findings presented below start with the teaching context of each program where the individual teaching and learning activities were situated.

The Author

The author has a dual role as the researcher and participant in the study. She is a native speaker of Chinese and holds a doctoral degree in Second Language Education from an university in the United States. The author started learning English in middle school and begun studying Japanese as a foreign language during the sophomore year in college. Her intermittent experience in learning Japanese is over a course of eighteen years.

Background of the Four Programs

Vocabulary, grammar, speaking, and reading are the four categories chosen for comparisons and discussions because these four instructional areas were commonly observed across all the programs in question. Individual activities were subsumed to one of the four instructional areas based on their primary learning objectives perceived by the author at the time of instruction.

Program A. The Program A, housed within in an academic department in an university in Taiwan, offered a minor upon students' completion of six sequential language courses (i.e., Beginning I and II, Intermediate I and II, and Advanced I and II). All the courses were taught by Professor A with approximately 25 students in each class, and the classes met three times a week for fifty-five minutes each session. Professor A was a native speaker of Japanese and held a master degree in Japanese Applied Linguistics. She had lived in Taiwan for twenty years and was able to communicate with the students using both Mandarin Chinese and English.

The series of 外国学生用日本語教科書 [Japanese Textbook for International Students] was the textbooks, and each chapter included sections of reading, grammar, vocabulary and

supplemental linguistic information with explanations in Chinese. *Gojūon* [fifty sounds in Japanese] was covered in the first class and subsequently tested in the following class. In each of the six courses, students incrementally learned seven to eight chapters on average, submitted one to two short essays, and took mid-term and final written examinations. No oral exams were administered in the Program A.

The class was a teacher-centered one, in which the professor lectured and the students quietly listened to it and take notes. The classes were conducted in Japanese, English, and Chinese, and linguistic charts and trees were often drawn on the blackboard to help students understand the target syntax structures and vocabulary. A grammar translation approach was adopted to drill students on grammatical structures in reading activities and to evaluate students' understanding. This learning process, based on Krashen's Monithor Theory (1991), is a conscious one where learners' attention is directed to focus on explicit knowledge that can monitor learners' grammatical use in communication. At the conclusion of each chapter, the students took turns to verbally translate the reading passage into Chinese and analyzed the syntax at a sentence level. Then content questions would be asked in Japanese about the readings to conclude the learning of the chapter.

The author completed the series of six courses, received the Japanese minor, and found the curriculum effective particularly in helping the author capture grammatical knowledge, a critical skill enabling the author to continue her studies in, for example, advanced Japanese writing and classical Japanese in graduate school. The author also appreciates the structure of the courses that allowed the author to walk out of each class session with a sense of fruitful productivity in a tangible gain of vocabulary and sentence structures. However, a lack of intentional training in speaking and listening over the period of three years may have contributed to the author's struggle in listening comprehension and temporal fluency during her studies in her second Japanese program. This observation generally accords with Swain's (1995) output hypothesis that argues when L2 learners have limited practice in verbal communication during instructional hours and were not pushed to apply their discourse skills, they can fail to develop more marked grammatical distinctions in their output. In addition, a schedule that informed the students of the class content of each session was not made available, and as a result of that, the author was unable to accurately predict the coverage of the incoming session or prepare herself appropriately for the class.

Vocabulary. In general, vocabulary words were introduced in context with examples, and new words from a chapter were often regrouped and then presented to the students. That is, vocabulary words were not introduced following the sequence they appeared in a chapter. For example, adjectives related to emotions from a chapter would be bundled and taught together. Related vocabulary words from the previous chapters were sometimes reviewed with new words. The students were often called on to make a sentence using a new word and formulate answers to the questions using the target words. Then, instant corrective feedback on pronunciation, intonation, grammar use, and conjugations were provided on the spot.

Being a native speaker of Japanese with the training in Japanese linguistics may have been one of reasons why Professor A was able to instantly provide multiple examples of and contexts for the use of target vocabulary words. Inclusion of already learned words from the past in new words reinforced the author's retention of vocabulary words. In addition, the classes being predominantly teacher-centered with little interactions or questions invited may have helped with the class time management. The lecture-style delivery allowed enough time for detailed illustration of word meaning and their usages in context. The enriched information on vocabulary

words helped the author make word association and then retain most of them from the six classes for a long time, though the author wouldn't know if a more student-centered negotiation of word meanings, promoted by the communicative teaching approaches, would have attained or exceeded the same learning results.

The classes across levels were all information-intense, and the students were required to understand and memorize the vocabulary in each chapter in advance so the students could quickly comprehend what was said to them and keep up with the class pace. The students were often randomly called on to answer questions, and they would be criticized if they did not pay attention or get the answers right. The curriculum seemed to leave little room for those who failed to meet the expectations. The rigorousness of classes, however, pushed the author to constantly hold herself accountable for her own learning and motivated her to review and preview the materials in an attempt to answer questions correctly in class. The author appreciated the challenges and strictness she experienced in the program and believed it was the rapid class pace and intense productivity that kept her engaged throughout the program.

Grammar. Grammar patterns were taught in a way that was effective to the author's learning because, for instance, both the conjugated forms of the verb 買う [to buy]" (e.g., 買った, 買うなら, 買うと, 買えば, 買ったり, 買いに, and 買いながら) [bought, if buying, when buying, when buying, to buy (and other actions), in order to buy, and while buying] and their varied functions carried in different hypothetical particles (e.g., たら, なら, と, and ば) [if, if, if, if/when, and if/when] were emphasized simultaneously in class. Students were drilled on forms using substitution (e.g. ご飯を食べながら、宿題をしてください and スミスはよく大きい荷物を抱えながら、電車で飛び込みます) [While you are eating, please work on your assignment, and Smith often jumps into the train while holding a big bag.] and extension (e.g., 田中さんは 銀座に帰りませんか→田中さんは 銀座へ 展覧会を見に 帰りませんか) [Does Tanaka go back to Ginza →Does Tanaka go back to Ginza to see the exhibition] exercises. New structures were often analyzed first to the class, and then the students would be called on to semantically and syntactically compare the new structures with the previously introduced ones. When explaining grammatical patterns, Professor A would write down sentences and drew charts on the blackboard with dotted line highlighting collocations and conjugations in each group of words (e.g., verbs in the upper-one row and *na*-adjectives) to raise students' consciousness of the forms. Professor A's neat penmanship and linguistic diagrams were helpful for visual learners like the author. In addition, after having become accustomed to understanding grammatical structures from a more analytic perspective, the author started to focus on forms and study grammar in each chapter with reference to the related structures learned previously to compare their usages and forms. Doing so, the author was able to review old information and retain new information through associating similar patterns. Overall the grammar learning was rewarding. However, the students didn't have much of an opportunity to attempt trial and error to test their hypotheses about Japanese language. Without trying out their creative sentences, the students wouldn't know what strings of Japanese words would be impossible culturally, semantically, and/or grammatically. This observation can support why output is a necessary step in Gass's (1988) framework and why input is insufficient for SLA to take place if L2 learners aim to develop a higher degree of accuracy in their expression.

Speaking. The speaking activities were mainly manifested in answering content questions regarding the readings and making sentences using new words when learning the vocabulary of the chapter. Role-plays, skits, rote memorizations of a text, or drill on words or sentences were not observed in the program A. In addition, speaking skills were not tested at any

point in the program. The author in general comprehended Professor A's messages in Japanese in class partially because such comprehension could occur without extensive syntactic analyses of the input. However, without constant output opportunities, the author was not pushed to pay attention to the means of her expression. Insufficient practices in conversing in Japanese in the Program A might have resulted in author's struggle in the Program B, where speaking skills were greatly emphasized.

Reading. In the beginning of each chapter in the textbook, a text in a narrative form was presented with the target vocabulary words and grammar contextualized. The text was discussed at the end of each chapter as a culminating class activity. Reading could appear to be a process of decoding and translating in the author's viewpoint. When studying the text in each chapter, the students were expected to demonstrate their linguistic knowledge by expounding grammatical mechanisms in context and then translating the meaning at the sentence level. The author noticed that some students were unable to precisely translate the texts from Japanese to Chinese either because of the complicity of grammar or the meaning of multiple words strung together. On the days when the author did not familiarize herself with the new words and grammar points in the chapter, she struggled with this type of bottom-up reading practice. With this being said, a top-down approach was also adopted to guide the students to grasp the main ideas through a series of open-ended content questions in Japanese. The reading activities implemented in the program taught the author that it was critical to attend to both syntax as well as semantics and details as well as overview, and that reading activities were an effective tool to review vocabulary and grammar in context and improve one's overall Japanese skills.

Program B. The Program B was housed in a department in a university in the United States. The Program included five levels of instruction in three types of deliveries: regular classroom, individualized Instruction, and intensive classroom. The instructors that the author had were all native speakers of Japanese with some of them being full-time instructor and some teaching assistants. The author started with *Fourth Year I* (regular classroom) in the Program B one year after she earned a Japanese minor from the Program A. With the Program B, she continued her Japanese language learning for seven quarters and ended with Fifth Year III. The teaching materials were the series of *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (Jordan & Noda, 1990), handouts, and authentic materials, such as new articles. The Forth Year classes met regularly in 55-minute classes, including both ACT and FACT sessions, for five times a week. ACT classes were delivered in Japanese with a focus on doing things in the language, whereas FACT classes were conducted primarily in English and offered explanation and analyses of the language. Daily grading on students' in-class oral performance was consistently implemented. Students were provided with a detailed daily schedule to prepare themselves for the class activities accordingly, which the author found exceptionally helpful in pacing her learning and developing herself into a responsible language learner. The Fifth-Year Japanese included both group and individualized sessions, and the number of credit hours that students registered for the class dictated the number of individualized sessions that students had each week.

The Program B was different from Program A in several ways. The first difference that struck the author was that her classmates in general spoke Japanese with a high degree of fluency and confidence. Although the placement test result indicated *Forth Year Japanese I* was the right class for the author, she apparently had weaker overall listening and speaking skills compared to her classmates and did not have automaticity in her speech that allowed a language learner to speak without constant pauses to search for words. The author also observed that most of the

students in her Japanese language classes (1) were fluent temporally and appeared to be able to express themselves without having to conjugate words in their head in advance, (2) were skilled in listening and accustomed to authentic speech speed, (3) seemed unable to write, read, or explain the nuances among similar grammar patterns well (e.g., *すると* and *そこで*) [then and anyway], (4) memorized the assigned dialogues prior to the class but could be uncertain about which dialogues they needed to act out when prompted, (5) constantly received corrective feedback on their pronunciation, intonation, and grammar, and (6) were active in participating in the class activities. Additionally, an array of speaking and listening exercises was designed to intensively engage the students, and there was no any down time in class. Taking notes and using the textbook were discouraged because it was crucial for the students to pay full attention to the instructor and classmates' utterances in class. Furthermore, the textbooks were written in Romanization of Japanese and English; namely, Hiragana, Katakana, or Kanji were not dominantly used in the author's Fourth Year Japanese.

The Program B adopted a daily grading policy to meticulously document students' speaking performances of the day, and evaluations of students' speaking skills began as soon as the class started. It was often observed that a student walked into the classroom, and as she settled down into her seat and assumed the questions the instructor asked, such as, "Did you have a good dinner last night?" were welcome greetings, she soon came to realize that her utterances were already being graded and that the "greetings" were being purposefully directed to introduce the assigned rote-memorized dialogues of the day.

Being evaluated at all times in class was not especially stressful to the author; however, knowing "rehearsed" performances were assessed based on how precisely one could recite the dialogues to the letter, the author found herself having to limit the selection of words and structures had she wished to receive a good grade. Daily grading had its merits in sending numeric feedback consistently, and the author used it as an overview indicative of her performance of the day. Over time the numbers, however, became less valid in delivering the intended information without qualitative, performance-specific comments. The author was sometimes puzzled over, for example, why she received a higher rating when she was less prepared or vice versa. Since speaking with the instructor on a daily basis for clarification of the rating was not practical, inquiries were left unanswered.

Vocabulary and Grammar. Vocabulary words and grammar points, on principle, were learned independently by the students, and they were neither explained in an explicit way or a constant component among the class routine activities. During the role-plays or application exercises, for instance, if a student used *を通して* [through], instead of *を経て* [by way of] in the answer, the instructor would simply repeat the student's answer with *を通して* [through] being replaced with *を経て* [by way of] without further explanations. This error correction approach was effective in having the mistake pointed out instantly through reformulation and correctional recast because, as Larsen-Freeman and Long state (2016) suggest, such interaction to clarify meaning helps teachers and students to make input comprehensible while still consisting of unknown linguistic components to lead to potential intake for acquisition. However, the author sometimes had hard time extrapolating from one simple feedback and hypothesizing rules inductively based on one reformulated phrase, considering exceptions in linguistic rules could be common. Due to a time constraint, students' questions, such as what other forms the answers could take, were left unexplored.

Speaking. Based on the observations that the Program B invested most of the instructional hours to develop learners' speaking and listening skills and that the students in the

author's classes seemed to be able to comfortably interact with others using Japanese, the author perceived that the language curriculum was centered on development in spoken Japanese skills. A variety of speaking activities was designed to engage the students, enhance fluency and accuracy, and increase automaticity. The activities of each chapter took Core Conversations (CCs) in the textbook as the departure point and associated drills and application exercises followed. The CCs in each lesson contained several short dialogues, and the students were required to memorize them and recite them in the beginning of the class. The students were also expected to retain the CCs in order to carry out the corresponding application exercises. Typically, there would be a few CCs, drills, and application exercises assigned as the learning objectives of each session. An example of CC is as follows (Jordan and Noda, 1990).

(Japanese) Kono hoñyaku, zēnibu anāta gā saséretà n̄ da soo desu ne!

(Non-native) Êe. Anó señsèe ni wa kotówarènai girî gā âru kara, sikáta gā nàkatta n̄ desu. (p. 186)

[Japanese: I hear that you were made to do all of this translation!

Non-native: Yes. (It is that) I have an obligation to that teacher not (to be able) to refuse, so there was no way out of it.]

During the first few quarters, the author did not fully understand what she needed to do in order to succeed in class. While she understood the dialogues, she was not able to act them out naturally. At first, she did not know that the speaking practices in class evolved around CCs and that to memorize CCs meant to recite CCs word for word with absolutely no variation. The second obstacle was for the author to respond to prompts and props (e.g., photos and objects) in the way the instructor had planned. For example, when being shown a picture as a cue to elicit the target CC, the students often seemed unsure and would confirm their speculation by asking “ちよつとわかりませんが、先生、今、CC1 ですか?” [I am a little bit confused, Professor. Are we supposed to recite CC1 dialogue now?] This response from the students shows that the prompts were not always effective in eliciting the target answers. The third challenge was that the author was discouraged to use words or structures other than the target ones of the day when answering questions or performing in role-plays. Another hurdle was for the author to situate herself at ease when being constantly corrected for pronunciations and cut off in the middle of utterances, though she understood the intervention was to improve her accuracy and pronunciation. Nevertheless, the benefits of memorizing CCs outweighed the drawbacks in the author's case.

The author found efforts paid to memorize CCs and drills to be rewarding in a long run on different levels. First, at the word level, years' training in memorization and rehearsal of strings of words had facilitated the author to do inflections of forms with automaticity. Second, at the sentence level, the memorized phrases were handy and at the author's disposal especially when she was engaged in conversations on unfamiliar topics. She was prepared to “mix and match” the learned dialogues and construct new exchanges accordingly. Third, at the discourse level, the author was exposed to a variety of contexts provided in CCs and their accompanying texts. The deep impression made by CCs and formulaic fluency gained through rote memorization and drills enabled the author to quickly search culturally and linguistic appropriate exchanges in her head to get conversation started when interacting with others. In short, the curriculum that focused on speaking skills had supported the author in becoming accustomed to conversations of various topics, an authentic speech speed, and use of formulaic expression to fluently express

herself. In addition, constant error corrections in class had enhanced the author's consciousness about pronunciations and her unnatural pauses when conjugating words.

The observation above can be understood from the notion of implicit knowledge in Krashen's (1991) Monitor Theory and Gass's (1988) theoretical framework of SLA. L2 learners' implicit knowledge can be further categorized into formulaic knowledge and rule-based knowledge. According to Ellis (1994), formulaic knowledge contains ready-made stocks of language, whereas rule-based implicit knowledge refers to generalized and abstract grammatical patterns that have been internalized by L2 learners. The author's long-term memorized strings of words developed during her enrollment in the Program B had become intuitive to the author in that the author did not need to consciously think about what she was saying or resort to her explicit linguistic resources as she outputted her utterances in communication.

Reading. In the author's perception, reading skills started receiving instructional attention in the Program B when she was in Fifth Year Japanese. In both group and individualized sessions, the author was required to finish the reading assignments prior to the class and then verbally summarize the readings and discuss the content in class. The readings included texts written for learners, magazine essays, and news articles, and in order to answer questions successfully, the author needed to comprehend the details of readings, make inferences, and support her arguments. When the students were confused over linguistic mechanisms or the cultural and social background of the readings, the instructor would explain them. However, the expectation was for the students to study the readings independently in their own time and dedicate the class hours to discussions.

The reading activities described above were engaging primarily owing to the fact that most of the questions were open-ended and encouraged the author to apply both linguistic and critical thinking skills to sustain through the discussions. For instance, the class discussions on an article about 单身赴任 [an individual is sent away for a job assignment without the family's accompany] required not only the author's command on Japanese vocabulary, grammar, and discourse but also cultural knowledge to describe and narrate the past events in the article, discuss their influences on the Japanese society, and support her viewpoints from different perspectives. The reading process, where the author started with reading assignments and then deepened her comprehension through verbal discussions, helped the author connect the written language with the spoken one, practice reorganizing long paragraphs from the readings into shorter ones for verbal communication, and improve accuracy in the use of vocabulary and grammar. This observation is supported by Swain's output hypothesis (1995) and the interactional approach of Long's (1983), in which L2 input is made comprehensible through interactions, and additionally, L2 learners are pushed to focus on the means of expressions in response to the comprehended input during outputting.

Program C. The author audited *Advanced Japanese* with the Program C at University C eight years after her last Japanese class in the Program B. This course functioned more of a maintenance course for the author; with this being said, the author attended every class session on time and completed her assignments as instructed. Professor C, a native speaker of Japanese and received a Master's Degree in Japanese Pedagogy from an American institution, taught all the classes in the program, and students in the program formed an intimate community to support each other's learning. The textbooks were the series of *Yookoso* [Welcome!], and all language skills were attended to in class. The class met three times a week for fifty minutes each, and there were about six students in the author's class.

The structure of agendas in each class session was flexible, and the climate of the learning was relaxing. The students were encouraged to have autonomy in pacing their own learning and make their individual academic needs and interests known to the professor in class. The class sessions usually started with a vocabulary dictation quiz, and then activities that centered on the target structures and vocabulary, such as role-plays and information gaps, followed. The class often ended with learning individual Kanji [Chinese characters adapted for Japanese]. On a typical day, the class would progress leisurely, the students would take time to formulate their answers, and Professor C would patiently attend to students' questions. The students were also offered opportunities to decide what they would like to do in class. It was possible that the class didn't get to finish what had been planned due to an unexpected amount of time devoted in, for example, answering questions. The languages used in class were both Japanese and English.

Vocabulary. Comprehension of chapter vocabulary words was evaluated in part through dictation quizzes and in part with the reading-aloud activities. When learning chapter vocabulary words, the students would take turns to read aloud the words on the list for the professor to check on the pronunciations. Sometimes the professor would ask questions for the students to answer using the target vocabulary words as the class went down the chapter vocabulary list. Kanji [Chinese characters adapted for Japanese] practice was also part of vocabulary learning, and one to two class sessions for each chapter would be devoted to learning individual Kanji [Chinese characters adapted for Japanese] through air tracing of each stroke, investigating the meaning of radicals, and discussing the use of them.

Grammar. Grammar points were explicitly explained using English, and varied application tasks followed to reinforce the understanding. For example, when learning the giving and receiving verbs (i.e., あげる, もらう, くれる, いただく, and やる) [to give, to receive, someone gives it to the speaker, to receive it from people who has a higher rank than the receiver, and to do it for animals], the class was engaged in a number of role-plays about giving favor, receiving gifts, and the like to use these verbs properly. Practices of grammatical structures also carried out in the written assignments, such as workbook pages (e.g., fill-in-blank and substitution questions) and weekly journal. Krashen's (1999) Monitor Theory was often observed during the speaking practices on grammar, in which L2 learners' attention is focused on forms and given sufficient time to access their explicit knowledge to structure their output. In addition, during this particular activity, since all the students in class were directed to work on spoken accuracy, the affective filter was low and the students were willing to let their explicit knowledge in to monitor their utterances.

Besides speaking tasks, the students wrote a journal entry weekly as a writing practice, and it helped the author reflect on and apply the new words and structures. This activity directed the author's attention to the use of cohesive devices (e.g., ばかり and ならでは) [only because and only possible with] and offered an opportunity for the author to be creative and find out what was linguistically and culturally possible and impossible from the professor's comments.

Speaking. A variety of speaking activities were arranged to engage the students, such as routine greetings to get the class started, describing a photo to a partner, interviewing a partner about their plan for summer, and having a brief conversation with a partner on assigned topics. Most of the speaking tasks were either in a format of pair work or teacher-student exchanges. While the exercises were participant-friendly and intentional, they didn't appear to have high structural intensity in stimulating critical thinking skills or eliciting specific target words and structures. Some of the students constantly needed extended time to compose their answers, and

as a result of the lack of spontaneity and automaticity in their speeches, idle time elapsed among those who sat inactively through the wait time.

Reading. The readings included authentic materials and exercises from the textbook. Usually the class would review the readings together by inviting one of the students read aloud the texts. Subsequently, content questions would be discussed to help the students comprehend the readings and work on their speaking skills.

Considering that a daily schedule was not made available, the students would usually come to class without knowing what to expect precisely. Consequently, that the students completed the readings prior to the class was rarely observed, and much of the class hours had to be taken up for students' scanning, skimming, and reading the texts on the spot. More of the instructional hours could have been focused on exploring the readings through elaborating the details of the content had the students finished the reading assignments in their own time.

Program D. The Program D was located in Japan and offered summer intensive programs in addition to year-long programs for learners of Japanese as a second language. One year after her participation in the Program C, the author joined the two-month summer intensive program in Japan. The author was placed in the intermediate-high track, which offered four forty-five-minute classes on a daily basis Monday through Friday, and the instructors were three different native speakers of Japanese. Ten students from six different countries were enrolled in this track, and Japanese was the only language allowed in the classroom. The course packets were the series of *いつでもどこでも日本語* [Japanese Anywhere, Anytime], prepared by the Program D. Each class session had clear learning objectives, and the students had abundant opportunities to practice speaking in a teacher-centered learning environment.

The learning pace was rapid, and the students were expected to attend classes ready to actively participate in various tasks. This learning culture motivated the author to be a proactive learner, who followed the daily schedule to prepare herself to fully engage in the class activities, such as discussions, drills, role-plays, and presentations. All the sessions the author attended were rigorously structured with well-defined goals and activities, and the lesson plans were efficiently implemented to keep the teaching and learning following through the intended exercises.

Vocabulary and Grammar. Three of the daily four classes were devoted to grammar and vocabulary practice through a delivery of short conversations. For instance, the instructor placed an object in a bag and asked the students to touch and guess what it was in the bag without seeing the item in an effort to elicit the target structure *ようです* [seem] as in *苹果ようです* [it seems to be an apple]. The activities of this kind were sequenced throughout the classes to implicitly introduce grammar and vocabulary to mimic an authentic communication, in which, according to Krashen (1999), implicit knowledge could be acquired because the students' attention was focused on meaning, rather than forms. These activities were engaging and effective because the author was able to associate the forms with their functions and meaning through actions and visualization.

Explicit instruction on grammar or vocabulary was not observed, but handouts of grammar illustrations and new words were distributed ahead of the time so the students were able to study the materials in advance in an attempt to involve themselves in a variety of application activities.

Speaking. Speaking opportunities were available across the board throughout the program, such as presentations, group discussions, questions and answers on readings, short exchanges to apply target grammar points and words, and comments on daily news.

Error correction was implemented consistently in class, and corrective feedback could take different forms. Sometimes instructors would simply raise their eyebrows upon hearing mistakes to prompt students for self-correction, but some other errors required detailed explanations and more examples from the instructors. Accuracy was important to the author because she believed using Japanese correctly was one way to show her respect to the people and culture of Japan. Therefore, corrective feedback in a constructive form and having her mistakes pointed out on the spot benefited the author's learning.

At the end of the semester, the students at the school could enter a speech contest on the showcase day. Before the contest, the contestants could rehearse with their classmates for peers' feedback. The author particularly found this co-curricular activity effective for her learning for a number of reasons. First, the preparation for the contest offered an opportunity to review and apply what she had learned. Second, the process of preparation encouraged collaboration among peers. Third, during the contest, listening to contestants from more advanced levels motivated the author to continue to improve her speaking skills. Finally, it was a good training for public speech on the whole.

A 30-minute exit exam was conducted to evaluate individual students' gain in speaking proficiency over the course of two months. The results were compared to the scores obtained on the placement tests administered in the beginning of the term. A quantitative and qualitative report on the proficiency were sent to the students to conclude their learning in the Program D.

Reading. Each chapter in the course packet consisted of an article, and the students were required to read it with unfamiliar words and information researched in advance and then timely answer comprehension questions in class. The questions from the instructors helped the author recheck her understanding of the texts and correct her misunderstanding of the readings if any. The students were usually adequately prepared, and the class thus was able to progress efficiently from questions about facts to inferential ones. The dynamic class pace allowed the students to stay actively involved. The discussions of the readings provided a great opportunity for the students to express themselves freely using long, complicated sentences in an extended discourse.

FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This research project is intended as an exploratory study, and the author does not attempt to generalize the limited data at hand to all Japanese language learners or teaching contexts. The overview of the four programs in Method has described an array of pedagogical practices and their effects on the author's learning from a learner's vantage point. In this section, the discussions are furthered to center on questions that the author had about her own learning during the time of her enrollments.

Did the Author's Learning of Japanese Take Place as Gass's (1988) Theoretical Framework Predicts?

Gass's cognitive framework suggests five major sequential steps in SLA, and they are to receive input, notice input, comprehend input, intake, and output. To facilitate each step to take place for L2 learners, a variety of pedagogical accommodations are strategically implemented by teachers

in class. The current study has described a number of teaching methods, pedagogical tasks, instructional strategies, and curricular activities that were practiced in the classrooms. Pedagogical approaches and classroom exercises sometime can generate learning results that exceed the expectations of teachers and learners, and there are also times when instructional activities do not achieve the intended effects. The discrepancies between what teachers intend to attain and what L2 learners can actually perform can be a result of, for example, individual learners' differences in the SLL process, class delivery skills of instructors, and variance between teachers' and learners' perspectives on L2 learning.

The observation of the author's SLL in the four programs in the current study shows that, as a whole, the author went through these five steps in Gass's (1988) cognitive framework when learning new information in the Japanese language. However, the five steps were not always in a linear order, nor was one cycle of the five steps always sufficient to result in her acquisition. For instance, in the Program B, the author received abundant input of Japanese in class because the only language allowed in the Program B was Japanese, and this policy was strictly enforced. While being immersed in Japanese was advantageous to the author's learning, due to the setup of the curriculum in the Program B, on many occasions, the author had to sprint from the step of receiving input to the step of outputting in class with only limited time in between just enough to memorize the target input in order to participate in class activities on the spot. Outputting in these situations was often carried out without the author's thorough comprehension of the input; that is, the author rote memorized the formulaic phrases and used them without a full understanding of their meanings or syntactic structures. This observation seems to propose that learners could possibly deviate from the route of input-noticing, comprehensible input, and intake in Gass's framework of SLA and dive into output outright. More research is needed to investigate if and to what extent such acquisition can endure. The author, however, does not suggest that class activities of this kind that intensify the learning process and produce immediate results need to be removed. To the contrary, a strong sense of achievement and a higher level of productivity obtained from these rapidly-paced tasks can motivate and encourage L2 learners to stay focused, improvisational, and creative in communication.

How do Different Teaching Approaches Benefit Learning?

The grammar translation method, defined by Ellis (1994), is a teaching approach that provides explicit knowledge to L2 learners through rule explanation, and because this method is usually delivered in a lecturing style, it is often noted for overlooking communicative aspects of language acquisition. Nevertheless, in the Pennsylvania Project (Smith, 1970) where the L2 learners' four language skills were evaluated, the learners who received the grammar-translation teaching method outperformed the other two groups of students who respectively received the functional approach and the mixed method of the fictional and grammar-translation approaches. In addition, based on the observation of the author's SLL experience, when a grammar-translation approach is implemented effectively, the grammatical knowledge gained through this method can serve as a foundation for learners to develop their overall language skills. The author's training in the Program A was done through a grammar-translation approach, and this method guided her to closely observe nuances in meanings and functions of the linguistic forms that otherwise wouldn't have been noticed. In another word, the grammar-translation method observed in the current study had the effect of consciousness-raising (Ellis, 1994) for the author

that her attention was directed at explicit rather than implicit knowledge, and the learned system was used to monitor and thereby to enhance the grammatical accuracy of the author's communicative output. Furthermore, the explicit knowledge learned through the grammar-translation method in the Program A successfully prepared the author to analyze the forms and understand the meaning more accurately when she read classical and modern Japanese literature in the Program B.

The audiolingual teaching approach is often realized through repetitions and mechanical drills. This method is based on behaviorism and considers language learning as a process of habit formation. Although learners do not always buy in the idea of memorization, based on the author's language learning experiences, a good use of audiolingual activities can lead to learners' control in pronunciation and structures and then eventually accuracy, fluency, and spontaneity. The Program B and D are examples of such a teaching approach. The designs of role-play and dialogue practices in these two programs were influenced by audiolingualism and intended to develop implicit knowledge of the rule through practices (Ellis, 1994), but their implementation incorporated essences of communicative language teaching (CLT), where skills of creating language to achieve the communication goals in the given context were a must. Based on the qualitative observations of the overall improvement in the author's spoken fluency and the speaking skills of the students in the Program B, compared to those in the Program A, the teaching method adopted in the Program B was effective in developing their learners into a fluent L2 speaker of Japanese with a high degree of automaticity.

CLT promotes opportunities to develop naturalness and spontaneity in learners' speeches through exercises that assimilate authentic conversations. Creative language use and a focus on meanings can engage learners to practice the language without overwhelming them with forms. CLT method can also attend to learners' needs in improving accuracy when it is combined with the audiolingual approach. For example, in a role-play of reporting a crime, where the storyline was designed based on an authentic situation, the author wouldn't have been able to effectively and fluently describe the incident and file the report to the police hadn't she repeatedly practiced formulaic expressions and blocks of collocation words during the mechanical drills with an audiolingual approach prior to this communicative task. Without mechanical, repetitive scaffolding of idiomatic expressions and phrases to internalize implicit knowledge, the author might have needed to search for words, suffer from inaccurate use of idioms, and stammer during the role-plays. However, when audiolingual and CLT methods are coordinated appropriately to complement each other, learners can stand a better chance to perform well. This is also to say, from a learner's point of view, that teachers should not discard a teaching method simply due to its theoretical or practical drawbacks because its strengths, though not necessarily evident at the outset, can contribute to L2 learners' language development independently and be further enhanced jointly with other methods, and its disadvantages can be strategically compensated for by letting in a complementary method, as how it was in the Program B.

How to Develop Spontaneity

One of the biggest hurdles in the author's learning of Japanese when starting the Program B was her lack of spontaneity in her verbal communication. Theoretically, the distinction between linguistic competence and performance (Chomsky, 2015) and Krashen's (1991) Monitor Theory can lend support to the observation in the current study that the author's knowledge about the

language didn't automatically grant her the skills of speaking it. Both of Chomsky's and Krashen's notions take a non-interface standpoint to view the relationship between implicit and explicit knowledges, alternatively between performance and competence. That is, acquired knowledge or performance is developed when L2 learners' attention is focused on meaning conveyance, and only this type of implicitly acquired knowledge and skills can initiate and sustain timely communication, though the learners' explicit knowledge or competence can monitor the grammatical accuracy of the utterance when sufficient time is made available for the learners to access it. This theoretical notion supports the observation that the author, who had three years' worth of explicit knowledge about the Japanese language, was unable to verbally express herself with automaticity or spontaneously participate in speaking tasks in the Program B when she first joined the program. Namely, the transfer from the author's competence about Japanese to her actual performance in outputting the language for communication did not automatically take place. If there was some connection between the author's implicit knowledge and explicit knowledge, it was not readily or easily observed in the beginning of the author's participation in the Program B. However, does this observation imply that author's explicit knowledge that she learned through the grammar-translation method in the Program A had no use to accommodate her meaning conveyance in spontaneous communication?

While Krashen (1991) maintains his non-interface position, Ellis (1994) puts forth that classroom practice of the target forms can aim at developing implicit knowledge when learners are ready to learn the target forms they are being taught. Rote memorization and drills are often part of practices implemented in class, but as a whole they are perceived somewhat negatively when it comes to learning. From a learner's standpoint, rote memorization is not popular among students not necessarily because it is a lower-order thinking skill but more so because it needs hard work from students to achieve the intended effect. Irrespective of its general unpopularity among L2 learners, a group of cognitive psychologists, curriculum theorists and instructional researchers, and testing and assessment specialists acknowledges that to remember, recall, and recognize are the basis of the six cognitive processes in Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). While memorizing materials is not the ultimate goal of learning, it provides fundamental knowledge for learners to branch off of. In the author's case, repeated drills, consistent recitations, and then applications in context in the Programs B and D had helped the author develop automaticity in her speech and transform her static knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation into dynamic skills. Another way to look at the development in author's spontaneity is that her linguistic knowledge learned through the grammar-translation method in the Program A served as a solid corner stone for the subsequent development in spontaneity with accuracy through the audiolingual and CLT activities in the Programs B and D. This observation, then, suggests that although explicit and implicit knowledge systems in L2 learners may be of non-interface, through successive intentional practices, explicit knowledge can be integrated into implicit knowledge and collaboratively enhance L2 learners' overall outputting skills.

Spontaneity in speech is one of the characteristics that an authentic conversation carries. Based on the author's learning experience, spontaneity can be cultivated through class activities when the tasks are focused on building skills in assessing situations and improvising within a well-constructed grammatical framework during interactions. Automaticity developed through these practices can enable students and instructors keep up their momentum during interactions in class and are subsequently transferrable to communication outside their classrooms. As a learner who aims to speak Japanese correctly and fluently, the author suggests that curricula

consider development in both aspects of learners' spontaneity and accuracy and not to overly invest in one at the expense of the other.

How to Create a Culture Conducive to Learning

The four programs that the author was enrolled in had different learning cultures with some being more rigorous and some more flexible. In a group learning setting, peers' performance and the overall learning culture affected the author's motivation and progress. For example, utterances from those who came to class well prepared could serve as a language model for the author, and their fluent speaking skills could help the class move along in a good pace. Those underprepared, on the other hand, required a longer response time to class activities and thus could affect the level of engagement of other students, who had to sit out during the wait time. According to the author's experiences studying in these four programs, a learning situation where underprepared students were present often resulted in a delay in the lesson plan implementation and created unproductive time for those who were ready to welcome challenges.

The observation above led the author to believe that when an effective and efficient learning culture is established at a class level, if not at a programmatic level, learners can enjoy learning more through productive interactions among peers. Such is one that inspires every member in the learning community to show up in class with a high level of preparation and readiness to actively absorb and construct new knowledge with and for their peers. Knowing that the majority of her peers were eager to learn and her professors were committed to promoting such a proactive learning culture had sustained the author's interest in learning Japanese.

How to Make the Most of the Instructional Hours

The in-class activities that the author found most helpful were the ones that she was unable to successfully complete without teachers' guidance, such as error corrections, analytical feedback, and contextualized practices with authentic examples. The most engaging class sessions took place when activities had been planned with intention and intensity and were subsequently implemented in a good pace. Sessions of this kind embraced the author in a strong sense of productivity and motivated her to keep going. Thus, it is important that teachers maximize their efficacy during the instructional hours by prioritizing activities that teachers' facilitation is indispensable and then pacing them efficiently.

Is Student-Centered Learning Better?

A student-centered classroom is often praised, but is it really a better pedagogical practice as it seems from a learner's point of view? On the continuum of teacher-centered and student-centered learning, most of the programs in this study were more towards the teacher-centered side with varying degrees, and the author found this orientation effective in helping her make appropriate progress. The professionally designed curriculum and syllabi had facilitated her learning on the whole.

All of the four programs discussed above carried some traits of student-centered learning, such as community engagement and open-ended problem solving. What would have qualified them to be more on the student-centered side is probably learners' authorship in making decisions related to curriculum design, implementation, and learning assessments. Participation in deciding when, how, and what to learn, to some learners, plays an important role in sustaining their interest and helping them achieve their goals. However, the fact that her instructors were more directive rather than consultative did not negatively affect the author's motivation or learning. To the contrast, the instructors' taking in charge of the learning content, activities, and pace might have been part of the reasons why the author was able to learn productively.

As a learner, the author was only familiar with a fraction of what learning Japanese entailed and appreciated the directions from her instructors. With the curriculum and activities meticulously planned and implemented by the teaching professionals, the author was able to focus on her learning. Making good decisions in curricular activities takes training and experience. In a language program where helping learners achieve target proficiency is the primary objective, the time and space to develop learners into a responsible curricular decision maker can be limited. It is worth more discussions whether it is in language learners' best interest to learn in a non-teacher-centered classroom where a decent portion of efforts from learners must be diverted away from language learning.

LIMITATIONS

Autoethnography as a research method is not without limitations or controversies. Criticisms often include the questions about academic rigor, methodological validity, subjectivity, the exclusive reliance on the self, and biases resulted from the researcher's dual roles as the informant and investigator. The descriptions and discussions of the four programs were based on the author's autographic experiences as a participant in the learning contact zones but an outsider of the Japanese instructional culture. The accounts, therefore, are not meant to be viewed as objective evaluations of the programs or represent any other learners' perspective in the programs.

CONCLUSION

An effective learning experience draws on a combination of factors, ranging from, for instance, material selections, flexible application of teaching techniques, the level of peers' engagement, and classroom management to learners' readiness to learn and overall learning culture of a language program. Learning may take place for learners in ways that differ from what teachers had projected, and good learning can happen when least expected. The sentence 一生懸命勉強してください [Please study with your utmost effort for dear life] was written on the blackboard on Day 1 of the author's first Japanese class in the Program A. The class was instructed to recite the phrase numerous times and memorize its structure and meaning without knowing anything else about Japanese language. Rote memorization is probably not a recommended dominant practice for most teaching contexts, but it worked in this particular classroom. The sentence made such a deep impression on the students that they used this sentence as a base form to formulate imperative sentences as they moved forward with their learning in the Program A. The

relatively advanced vocabulary word 一生懸命[with utmost effort for dear life] was also learned without noticeable difficulty on Day 1 and applied in context properly by the author later in the semester. This anecdote is a case in point that effective learning can be created by a teaching approach that is not most people's favorite, and both teachers and learners are encouraged to be open-minded in exploring their options to approach language learning.

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