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Promoting Learner engagement in the L2 classroom

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L2 の授業において言語学習者の集中力を高める取り組み

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Abstract

本稿では、筆者が授業プランを作成するときに活用している4つの言語教授方法について論じる。それらの教授方法とは、学習者に自信を持たせること、協同学習法の採用、正確さよりも流暢さを優先すること、そして教室におけるテクノロジーの活用である。それぞれについて、L2の授業において学習者の学習意欲と集中力を高めるという視点から議論する。また、それぞれの教授方法の定義や、それらを採用した理由を述べるにあたっては、その都度、適切なSLAの文献について言及する。読者が自身の授業で実践するにあたって役立つものとなるよう、徹底的な検証を試みる。さらに、筆者がここで議論する教授方法は、全ての言語学習者を対象としたものではなく、主に第2言語の習得に消極的な学習者を対象としたものであることを強調したい。本稿は、筆者を含む言語教員が、その教授法を導いている理論的な根拠に注意を払い続けることを促すという意味において、有益なものである。

This paper discusses four language teaching practices upon which the writer relies when designing lesson plans: building student confidence, employment of collaborative learning education, prioritizing fluency over accuracy, and utilizing technology in the classroom. Each of these items is presented with an eye toward enhancing student motivation and encouraging student engagement in the L2 classroom. The writer calls on relevant SLA literature to define each of the four teaching practices upon which the paper is focused, as well as to discuss his reasons for employing each method. Effort is made to provide a thorough review of each teaching practice in order to provide readers with a blueprint for utilizing them in their own classrooms. Throughout, the author is careful to stress that the methods he discusses herein are not intended to address the needs of all language

learners, but primarily those who possess less resolve for second language study. This article is productive in that it encourages language teachers, the author included, to remain mindful of the rationale guiding their approach to teaching.

キーワード：言語自我、協同学習、流暢さ、テクノロジー

Key Words: language ego, collaborative learning, fluency, technology

Introduction

Every so often language teachers should reflect on the methods they employ in the classroom in order to remain mindful of effective SLA (Second Language Acquisition) teaching practices and to maintain a healthy, robust approach to language education. An especially appropriate time to do so might be when an instructor changes department, takes on a new set of subjects, receives a promotion, or moves from one school to another. In 2017, I published an article in which I discussed various principles that I call upon to promote student motivation. At the time I wrote the article, I was teaching at Kwasei Gakuin University School of Science and Technology, a department composed mainly of young men studying in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) related fields. While there is a sizeable number of women in the department, it can be safely said that the overwhelming majority of students are male (Perez, 2018). Recently, I have relocated and am now a lecturer at Kobe Shoin Women's University, a school composed entirely of women, as the university's name suggests. Further, the students I am teaching are not STEM majors, but English majors. Considering this change in schools, the massive shift in student demographic and major, as well as the appropriacy of evaluating one's teaching methods on a regular basis, I feel this is the most suitable time to once again reflect on the ideas with which I approach the classroom setting.

In this paper, I will revisit and elaborate upon ideas put forth in my 2017 publication, regularly providing examples as to how I have implemented these teaching practices in some of my present classes. I will also introduce one additional tenet of language education that has come to complement my list. The points I will revisit are building student confidence, providing opportunities for collaborative learning, and prioritizing fluency over accuracy. Finally, I will discuss the most recent addition to my list: using technology in the classroom to increase student motivation. In discussing these elements, I will present relevant SLA literature to define each item as well as to discuss my intent for employing each method.

Here, it should be mentioned that the teaching practices I will discuss in this paper are not necessarily appropriate for all language learning contexts, but are primarily presented as a means to motivate and inspire learners who are not intrinsically engaged in or excited about the language learning process. As instructors we all come across high-level students who make teaching an easy process. These types of students participate and perform on a stratum that requires less energy on our part, aside from providing feedback, copious amounts of which they can manage and process. Apart from

receiving our assistance to fine-tune and perfect their work, exceptional students like these do not necessarily require the cheerleader on the sidelines that this paper will describe. This article is not about the language learner who makes teaching easy, though Kobe Shoin Women's University has plenty of students who match this description, particularly because of its rigorous study abroad curriculum. On the contrary, this paper is about the type of L2 student who exists at all universities that we as instructors work tirelessly to help perform and or participate at even just a minimal level.

Building student confidence

If students have the desire to achieve even some degree of second language proficiency, they will at some point have to embark on a series of possibly face-threatening moments, be it with an interlocutor or on paper (digital or analog), where they must put language-learned to the test. Redmond (2015), calling on scholarship spanning several fields, tells us 'face' is the image of ourselves that we attempt to present to others in order to establish and maintain social interactions with honor and dignity, unimpeded by embarrassment or the self we do not wish to present. In addition, he describes a face-threatening moment as any particular threat which puts this image of self under duress or, in his words, "produces feelings of embarrassment, shame, humiliation, agitation, confusion, defensiveness, or chagrin" (Redmond, 2015, p. 7). Under normal first-language conditions, this image of self is constantly threatened by, or at least at risk in, our day to day interactions with the people around us. Perhaps, then, nowhere is this more painfully the case than in the language classroom, where students must exercise their communication skills in a language not their own. The chances of experiencing one of the emotions Redmond describes becomes all the more possible.

As a language learner myself, I have faced this very situation more times than I prefer to recall. In my experience as a language learner in Japan, I have found that the mistakes I have made when speaking, no matter how minor, are often highlighted through a corrective process conducted by my interlocutors both in formal learning environments and casual settings outside the language classroom; though the former is not bothersome, the latter can, depending on the circumstances, be painful. For me, these face-threatening moments have always put communication in flux and place a damper on my self-confidence. As an instructor, therefore, I do my utmost to ensure my students, particularly ones with less L2 learning enthusiasm, never experience this feeling, at least not while they are in my classroom. Instead of putting undo pressure on them, I attempt to build what scholars have referred to as the "language ego" Brown (2001); Brown (2007); Zakarneh (2018).

The language ego can be described as "the identity a person develops in reference to the language he or she speaks" (Brown, 2007, pg. 69). Brown tells us "For any monolingual person, the language ego involves the interaction of the native language and ego development. One's self-identity is inextricably bound up with one's language..." (pg. 69). Naturally, this concoction of complexity could be understood, then, as a recipe for delicate emotions at play. As such, the language ego has come to be known by second language acquisition theorists as one of the key inhibitors to second language

learning. In his study on the impediments to English language acquisition facing Arab university students, Zakarneh (2018) tells us that the language ego can elicit feelings of vulnerability where the L2 is concerned and in turn sentiments of aversion toward the second language may arise. Further, he shares that it is often within this complicated context where students must possess a readiness to lose face while experimenting with language.

Bearing in mind, then, the fragile nature of language learning, particularly among monolingual students (the likes of which we often find in the Japanese university context), it is perhaps my number one responsibility to ensure that students with low confidence maintain what little confidence they may have and avoid moments of shattered language ego. Clearly put, I see it as my main job to help students maintain 'face' amidst the possibly face-threatening siege that shrouds second language acquisition. I attempt to do so by conducting language-ego-boosting moments. I have employed an effective way to achieve this aim in my classes that struggle with confidence and motivation.

It is important for instructors to provide opportunities wherein students may experience regular moments of success. Calling on Dörnyei's (2001) strategies for motivation, Perez (2017) suggests that teachers customize their lesson plans around the abilities of their students and regularly conduct activities which the students will successfully be able to complete. In so doing, Perez (2017) argues, student confidence and motivation will increase. Accordingly, during every class session, I make sure to incorporate one short activity unrelated to the main activity of the lesson, one which I believe all students can successfully complete. I administer this activity either at the beginning of class, to instill students with motivation and confidence to tackle the perhaps more challenging task or tasks that lay ahead, or during the middle of the lesson to give students a moment of respite and a means of refreshing their overall resolve and confidence to complete the remainder of the main activity at hand. These activities often come in the form of a game, but not necessarily.

To guarantee that students complete these tasks and thereby ensure that a moment of success does indeed transpire for all those participating, I explain the activity in both English and Japanese. I also allow students to ask questions for clarification in their L1, should they require it. Bartlett's (2018) study demonstrates the efficacy of utilizing learners' first language in the L2 language classroom. He tells us, "in regard to administrative requirements, the use of the L1 in L2 classrooms has been shown to benefit language analysis, error feedback, classroom management, comprehension checking and the presentation of grammar in the classroom, all positive points when considering the needs of students" (Bartlett, 2018, p. 242). Bartlett's research measured an increase in student motivation as a result of allowing for the usage of the L1 by both teacher and student alike; he quoted one of his students as saying, "This course made me enjoy studying English and as a result I want to take an English elective next year" (p. 248). Another student said, "My other subject teachers did not let me use Japanese to inquire, but I could use some Japanese in this class, which allowed me to understand the important points better" (p. 248).

Again, my reason for breaking up my lessons with a comprehensible task is to provide my less

motivated students with moments of success, however significant or insignificant in magnitude, at least once per class session. This is more likely to happen when the students know how to perform the task, due in part to bilingual task instruction/assistance, and thereby have the motivation and wherewithal to complete it. Usually, the end result is that students feel more at ease in the language classroom because their confidence as an L2 speaker, at least for a moment, did not face the threatening possibility of embarrassment or bruising that it more readily does during other, perhaps more complicated tasks. It is my hope that by providing said students with opportunities to amass a series of successful moments like these, they will be more likely to want to use their L2 both inside and outside the boundaries of the classroom.

Collaborative learning

Just as making efforts to strengthen my students' language ego has proven an effective means of maintaining and perhaps even bolstering their language-learning motivation, providing opportunities for collaborative learning has also demonstrated itself as an effective method in the classroom. Bowering, Leggett, Harvey, and Hui (2007) define collaborative learning as "a general teaching strategy where students work together in face-to-face interaction without direct teacher supervision to achieve a common goal" (p. 105). While this approach to teaching has long been a well-received notion in North American or Western teaching traditions, it has until recent decades been less utilized in classrooms in Asia. In describing the Chinese context, Bowering et al. (2007) argues that group work is not often employed in the classroom, even at the university level, because instructors are seen as the keepers and transmitters of knowledge and therefore by default they become the classroom focal point (p. 106). So, while implementing this approach with students who are less familiar with collaborative contexts may take time and ingenuity, I have always found the results to be well worth the effort.

There are a number of favorable things to be mentioned regarding the efficacy of collaborative experiences in the classroom. Dörnyei (2001) suggests that group work which encourages students to report personal information encourages students to get to know one another, which provides for a classroom that is in general happier and therefore more productive (p.44). Perez (2017) describes how administering group work activities which ask students to share their life experiences and or previously learned knowledge with their classmates eventually makes students feel more comfortable with one another and thereby allows a community to form. Chang (2010) shows us that depending on the temperament or disposition of the individual members in groups and the way they connect and support each other during activities, positive results are at the ready. Shao's (2014) qualitative study on the efficacy of group work, although focused on international students doing a master's degree in TESOL in the United States, highlighted one student's transition from presentation-anxiety to presentation-confidence as a result of groupwork. The researcher describes how the student transforms his feelings about presenting as the product of collaboration: presenting was no longer like a test for the student, but more like a moment for sharing information, a moment when making mistakes was no longer an issue

(Shao, 2014, p. 59). Further, Bowering, Leggett, Harvey, and Hui (2007), tell us that when using group work students are “actively engaged in learning”, and may “activate prior knowledge”, as well as “build on the ideas of others and...construct knowledge” (p. 105–106). They also share that effective group work provides for the development of “essential social and emotional skills, which are so necessary in the modern context” (Bowering et al., 2007, p. 106). In an effort to arrive at results such as these, I try to design activities where students can work in groups effectively.

A creative writing project that I adapted for use in one of my writing classes serves as a particularly telling example of collaborative learning's effectiveness. During the first few lessons of this particular writing course, I kept facing a severe lack of energy and motivation from my students, not to mention attendance issues. In an effort to move the class in a more positive direction, I utilized an activity (adapted from a writing activity as described on the British Council website; see reference list) that transformed the classroom environment during the class itself and even in the weeks following. First, I placed students in groups of three. Each group created a character which they drew onto an A3-sized paper. The group assigned the character a name, a set of personality traits, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and a person with whom he/she/it lived. I then issued all the groups the beginning half of a sentence with which to begin a creative writing story (for example, “(Insert character's name) heard an odd noise downstairs and...”). Each group completed the rest of the first sentence and proceeded to pass their character to the group adjacent to it. Taking into account all the characteristics of the character as decided by the makers, each A3 paper went from group to group, with each group adding a sentence to the story until it ended up back in the hands of its originators. This activity took about 35-40 minutes of class time but what resulted was a huge transformation in camaraderie between students themselves as well as the students and instructor. More laughter, energy, and interest filled the room than I had ever seen prior to doing this activity. While I cannot say it solved any of the attendance issues, it created a sort of cohesion among the students and instructor that took us through to the end of the semester. Perez (2017) shares, one “way to inspire students to stay the course in their L2 development is to create a strong sense of camaraderie among them, a sense of togetherness”, which, “If done correctly...can make the students feel committed to each other and their collective goals” (p. 54). This particular group activity served to accomplish this end quite well. I would also add that this activity was all the more successful due to the strategic assembly of each group.

From what I have witnessed over the years, group work will not necessarily produce desired results if the instructor does not strategically assemble its members. Chang's (2010) research tells us that the cohesiveness factor of groups is very important. Chang's both quantitative and qualitative study examined 152 participants from an English department in a Taiwanese university. Her investigation showed that when grouped with enthusiastic students, individual motivation increased positively. Here, I have qualified the words ‘students’ with ‘enthusiastic’ due to the cohesiveness factor of each group. She learned that positive feelings result when students are grouped with supportive students and ones interested in learning whereas negative ones may arise when placed with students of the opposite

temperament. For example, one of the students in Chang's study had this to say about one of his groupwork experiences:

“When I did a presentation in my previous group, I always just did an OK job because if I did it too well, my classmates would look at me strangely and say, ‘Why you work so hard...there is no point!’ I felt uncomfortable, so I just tried to do an average job. (Interview, April, 4, 2005)” (Chang, 2010, p. 147).

With this in mind, I try to assemble the members of a group in such a way that will yield positive motivation amongst its members.

In terms of the circumstances surrounding the creative writing activity discussed above, it was not until we were well into the course that I decided to transform the class into a collaborative learning one. Up until that point, I would occasionally have the students do pair work, but pairs were always put together with only convenience and proximity in mind: A student's partner was by default the person to whom they happened to be sitting beside at the start of the activity. However, after taking time to get familiar with each student, using my deliberative and albeit partly intuitive estimation, I assembled them into groups within which I felt each student would act as a positive influence on the others. I decided that this would be easier to accomplish by assembling small groups of three students, as opposed to four. For the most part, I think my group-assembling approach, although not scientific, worked relatively well. Having witnessed, then, the positive results yielded by the strategically-assembled groups in this creative writing activity, I had students remain in these groups throughout the rest of the semester. Most assignments and activities assigned thereafter, however simple or complex, were conducted in these groups (it should be noted that some assignments were conducted on an individual basis, as well). In other words, three students would work together to produce one product. The overall results of this approach worked well. Week by week, I saw students' attitude toward their work improve a striking amount. Further, this result was underscored by one other favorable aspect of collaborative learning that is worth noting.

As mentioned earlier, I believe that when students are permitted access to their L1 they increase their chances of successfully completing tasks and as a result their motivation is perhaps more likely to increase. Bartlett's (2017) study of 64 students at Kwansai Gakuin University enrolled in the School of Science and Technology argues the benefit of utilizing students' L1 in the classroom:

“Results indicate a clear preference for the use of the Japanese (L1) in EFL classrooms by the surveyed learners. Student opinions indicate that the opportunity to hear explanations of difficult language content...allows for them to further comprehend and understand the language...” (p. 79).

Bartlett (2017) concludes that the use of the L1 in the L2 learning environment is making a comeback as

a result of its procedural, administrative, teaching, and acquisition-related benefits. Further, Bowering et al. (2007) argue that students who may be less competent in their L2 can benefit from resorting to their L1 when it comes to tackling written or spoken language with which they may be unfamiliar. When students work in groups, they have greater access to the option of utilizing their first language with other group members to assist each other in understanding the tasks they are to complete.

One of my speaking classes has put this notion to the test numerous times. At the beginning of each session, or as mentioned earlier, sometimes during the middle of a class to give students a moment of respite, I have students engage in a short activity unrelated to the main task to put students in the English-speaking mode. This activity often, but not necessarily, comes in the form of a game. Whether the activity is simple or complex, I explain the directions in both English and Japanese. However, and as is more often the case, I explain the directions in English and then ask students to review the directions and procedures of the task in their groups using their L1. In this way, everyone can understand how to participate in the task. If students have further questions, they are permitted to inquire in Japanese about the task before we begin. When students are seated in groups, particularly in assigned groups within which they work throughout a semester, this process becomes easier and the results more successful with each passing task or activity. As a result, I am a firm believer in the power of collaborative learning. To be sure, what I have discussed here is only a small fraction of what could be said of its benefits.

Prioritizing meaning and fluency over accuracy:

Much like administering moments of success and conducting collaborative learning tasks have served to heighten my less engaged students' motivation and improve their attitudes toward learning, prioritizing meaning and fluency over accuracy has brought about similar results in my experience as an EFL instructor.

Before describing exactly what I mean by prioritizing fluency here, I should discuss how I am using the word itself; any review of SLA literature on the topic of fluency would demonstrate how complicated it has been to define the parameters of 'fluency'. Ryzcek (2013) tells us the meaning of fluency itself is varied depending on the context in which it is used when discussed in language-teaching circles. Ryzcek (2013) shares that some draw "distinctions between cognitive fluency and performance fluency" to characterize its meaning, while others use it simply to refer to the "smoothness" of speech delivery (p. 31-32). In terms of speaking, De Jong and Perfetti (2011) refer to fluency in terms of measurable items, such as the amount of repetitions, pauses, and hesitations that a speaker makes as well as the length of time each element lasts (p. 539–541). Nation's (2001) description of fluency as it pertains to studying vocabulary is simple and practical. In his seminal book on learning vocabulary, he dubs it the fourth of four essential strands for any language course. He says, "In activities which put this strand into action learners do not work with new language; instead they become more fluent using items they already know" (Nation, 2001, p. 3). Essentially, Nation would describe

fluency as the practice of using what language one already knows to practice whatever skill (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) upon which one is focused. Further, some, like Segalowitz (2016), tell us this variability in defining fluency has become problematic. In an article on the social and cognitive determinants of L2 fluency, he writes,

“This variability is problematic because a meaningful discussion about fluency requires agreement on what is being talked about. The solution to this problem has typically been to narrow the focus to one meaning. In this regard, a distinction is often made between knowledge of the L2 (e.g. of phonology, vocabulary, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics and pragmatic considerations) and the *fluency* or fluidity with which a speaker is able to implement that knowledge (rate of speech, pausing, hesitation and other temporal phenomena)” (Segalowitz, 2016, p. 80).

His point here, then, is to say that there is perhaps a better, more accurate, and probably multifaceted way of defining the elusive creature that is fluency. In a more recent work, Segalowitz, French, and Guay (2017) demonstrate how researchers are still attempting to tackle the mammoth task of defining fluency with the following:

“We define fluency here more narrowly in terms of temporal and hesitation phenomena that characterize the *fluidity* of speech delivery. These phenomena are also known as features of ‘utterance fluency’. The narrower definition does help to reduce, somewhat, the scope of what the term fluency might refer to, but even so, researchers still face the task of figuring out on which of many potential features to focus (p. 92).

Though most of the literature I have mentioned here is focused primarily on speaking, what makes this all the more complex is that this same type of intricate and varied approach in understanding fluency remains constant when discussing reading, writing, and listening, as well.

For the sake of simplicity, however, I will clearly state here that it is the spirit of Nation’s aforementioned fourth-strand-conceptualization of fluency that I am referring to in this section to discuss prioritizing fluency. In addition, Ryczek’s (2013) description of fluency also aligns with the way I would like to define fluency here: he tells us, “we can think of fluency as the ability of the speaker to speak smoothly with minimal pauses or hesitations in the target language and *accurately enough for the listener to understand*” (p. 32) (italics mine). I italicize the latter end of Ryczek’s statement in order to emphasize what I feel is the importance of prioritizing meaning and fluency over form and accuracy when working with less than enthusiastic L2 learners. If the listener, namely me, understands what the speaker is trying to say, a demand for accuracy does not need to be and perhaps should not be applied.

In other words, when it comes to my less engaged, less motivated, or less interested language

learners, I tend to prioritize or focus on fluency activities, or clearly put, on activities which utilize what students already know. During these activities, whether they are focused on writing or speaking, I am not overly concerned with students' accuracy. If their utterances or written words communicate their intention or idea, I refrain from pointing out innocuous mistakes. A torrent of corrections, be they written or spoken, may perhaps serve as a demotivating factor in this case. This is not to say that I never focus on accuracy or form, rather that I simply do not spend more time on accuracy and form than fluency and meaning. Again, I apply this principle only in classes where the atmosphere is wanting in motivation and overall interest in language education. These students are, generally speaking, not planning a career in academia or translation. The need for accuracy and focus-on-form is not a priority. Encouraging them to enjoy language so they might utilize it for communicative purposes is my *modus operandi*. In such situations, I do not believe students need a grammarian at their side.

Having said all this, it should be noted, however, that mainstream SLA literature does not necessarily support prioritizing fluency training over accuracy training. Task-based speaking studies demonstrate that fluency gains are easier to achieve than syntactic accuracy gains (Ellis, 2009; Skehan, Xiaoyue, Qian, & Wang, 2012). This is likely due to the fact that fluency does not require accuracy or complexity. Perhaps it is for this reason, then, the field of speaking development is presently more focused on improving accuracy than on improving fluency. In addition, some might also argue that encouraging fluency in speakers who make numerous syntactic errors is problematic; by doing so, there arises the worrisome prospect that those errors could become automatized or fossilized and therefore impervious to correction or modification in the future. These points should certainly not be ignored when designing activities for students who are open to and in want of rigorous training in accurate language production.

While it may be the case that mainstream SLA literature does not prioritize fluency over accuracy, and, further, while this paper does not present quantitative data to back the assertion that prioritizing fluency over accuracy is helpful for less enthusiastic language learners, my experience as an English teacher of 18 years in Japan has substantiated my reason for maintaining this notion. Having taught EFL in Japan for so many years, I have had to approach lesson planning and curriculum design from many different angles. In so doing, I have become better able to read and understand students' reaction to activities I conduct in the classroom. I have taken note that when I spend a lot of time on pointing out my students' errors either in written or spoken form, my less engaged students lose interest almost instantaneously. In the worst-case scenario, students may feel disheartened and demotivated by the barrage (or even small number) of corrections. In terms of written feedback, I find my students more often than not will have ignored my comments and corrections: I am aware of this because their second and third drafts will often not incorporate the corrections with which I provide them in their first drafts. In terms of spoken feedback, I find my students more often than not are unwilling to correct their utterance when made aware of it. When I insist, even if in the friendliest manner possible, some students will go as far as to demonstrate a level of annoyance that makes for an uncomfortable learning

environment. Again, it should be stressed that I recognize this is certainly not the case with all students, but mainly with students who are less keen to be in the language classroom in the first place.

With students such as these, I feel it is important to engage them in ways that will serve to promote a positive disposition towards L2 study; in ways that will create a moment of joy between them and the L2. Therefore, if said students are able to convey their intention in written or spoken form without a severe breakdown in communication, I do not highlight or call attention to their inaccuracies. I may encourage them to try and re-formulate their statement through occasional recasts and other similar devices, but I never point out their error outright. I allow the conversation to continue unimpeded so students do not feel beleaguered by the type of stress or discomfort that they have come to associate with traditional language learning. In this way, it is my hope to motivate students to associate English with something enjoyable, and, consequently, encourage them to use it in the future, even if only informally, outside of the classroom. The next and last section of this paper discusses one final medium which also serves as a powerful vehicle to increase student enthusiasm in the classroom.

Technology in the classroom

In my experience as an educator, there are very few approaches to language teaching that have served to increase my students' interest and focus during a lesson as well as the use of technology in the classroom. There is so much written about the benefits of using technology in the language classroom, one can barely imagine traversing through it all. Entire academic conferences and journals are now dedicated to the field. Couple this with the fact that technology, in particular computer technology, is rapidly developing on what seems like an almost daily basis, it would be a monumental endeavor to try and summarize all there is written on this topic. Suffice it to say, many advances have been made as result of using technology for SLA purposes. Cameron (1999) captures the magnitude of this phenomenon with his commentary on CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), only one aspect of the type of technology I am mentioning here:

“The perseverance and the enthusiasm of researchers into ways and means of improving the teaching and learning of languages using a technological medium which was designed for other purposes have been encouraging and constitute a phenomenon which, if one were in expansive mood, could be construed as a tribute to the ingenuity, intelligence, and dedication of language teachers” (pg. 1).

If scholars were declaring such things in 1999, one can imagine how much more this is the case now, 20 years later: As such, Chapelle and Sauro (2017) reflect:

“...technology has added multifaced new dimensions to teaching and learning, which include new ways of teaching every aspect of language, new pedagogical and assessment approaches, as well

as new ways of conceiving and conducting research and development” (p. 1).

If we are to believe these assessments on the topic, it is an exciting time indeed to be a language teacher.

In addition to the inspiration dealt by grandiose, wide-ranging commentaries like the ones above, there are a few user-friendly studies that I look to for actual direction in utilizing technology for language teaching purposes. While listing all of them would not be feasible, mentioning a few could certainly serve to demonstrate the notion that technology in the language classroom is at least something L2 instructors should consider. In his book, *Teaching and Researching Listening*, Rost (2002) shares, among other things, how to introduce technology in the classroom and advocates the use of video materials and other such technology to promote immediate student engagement; he argues that such technology lends itself to authenticity and provides material for countless teaching purposes. Calling on Rost's work to support his rationale, Perez (2014) outlines detailed lesson plans and the positive gains made for a speaking and listening course he taught to language learners at a high school in Japan, where he utilized a popular television series as content for listening and task-based activities. Further, Megasic (2017) presents what is essentially an instructional on streaming video using one website in particular and discusses four benefits it brings to the classroom: students can engage with “authentic language,” “verbal language features,” “paralinguistic features,” and can easily experience its “motivational appeal” (p. 200–201). Also utilizing audio-visual technology as a medium, Rammal (2006) provides a helpful how-to-account for creating authentic EFL materials to approach teaching the culture and identity of native speakers of English. Another compelling study, conducted by Chau and Cheng (2010) at the English Language Centre of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, analyzes the use of e-portfolios and their ability to encourage independent learning. Their qualitative study of 63 students demonstrates that the use of e-portfolios, though not without presenting some challenges, brings about “increased sense of ownership, helpful teacher feedback, enriched learning experienced at both individual and technological levels, enhanced opportunity for self-improvement, as well as a heightened awareness of the learning process” (Chau & Cheng, 2010, p. 939). Finally, and for purposes of what follows in this paper, Samad's (2018) qualitative study of 29 Biomedical Engineering undergraduate students in an ESL course at the University of Teknologi Malaysia demonstrates how the use of interactive online game-based technology can both enhance language learning and promote student engagement. At one point or another, I have found all of these accounts instrumental in creating my lesson plans.

During the past ten years, I have utilized these works to design lesson plans which include numerous types of technology: streaming video, e-portfolios, e-journals, asynchronous digital tools to connect students studying across various schools and even two separate nations, SNS communication platforms, voice recording, video recording, audio/video editing software, and the like. However, there is one tool in particular, described in Samad's (2018) study mentioned above, that I have recently

employed in numerous classes, which has been particularly effective with students lacking motivation: *Kahoot!*. Samad (2018) defines *Kahoot!* as a digital interactive platform available online that instructors can use to engage learners through discussions, surveys, or quizzes either made beforehand or on the spur-of-the-moment. This is how it works:

1. The instructor creates a quiz, discussion forum, or survey on the website (<https://kahoot.com>).
2. The instructor provides students with a code made available by the website.
3. Students go to a separate but related website (<https://kahoot.it>) using their smartphones and input the code.
4. All students meet on the same platform and interact either competitively or cooperatively to complete the task created by the instructor.
5. Students then see the results of their own responses and that of others immediately after inputting their own answers (this part of the process may remain anonymous if the instructor provides for it).

The best part about this digital application is that students can access it from their smartphones, which means that this can all be done in a classroom that does not have access to computer technology.

Digital platforms like this provides a technology that is accessible, user-friendly, and fosters classroom engagement to a degree that I have heretofore only very rarely witnessed. Like any language instructor teaching in Japan, I have trouble getting students in some of my classes to participate or volunteer answers. Posing questions, no matter how simple, to a class of 25 students has on many an occasion solicited zero response. Up until now, this has provided for a number of awkward moments of silence that often makes already wary students even warier about proffering a response. However, particularly in a writing course where speaking may not be essential to the course, a platform such as this one makes students more able to issue their responses or opinions to the class. I have found this particularly helpful when asking students to share with me their preference of two options. In most cases students would be unwilling to share their preference out loud but with interactive digital tools such as this, students are more willing to share their opinion, even if their thoughts become known to the whole class in step #5 (as noted above). It seems there is something much easier about sharing ones' thoughts or ideas via pushing a button or inputting a short answer on a smartphone than expressing the same thing vocally. In addition, the ability to turn any question and answer session into an online game and or survey tally for some reason or another makes students want to participate in class more. Also, the fact that students get to use their phones to engage with their classmates in class makes them happier to participate. In the past two semesters alone, I have seen individual students who would otherwise only partake very reluctantly come to life and join the learning process with a more positive disposition when using this tool. Hoping to repeat moments like this in the L2 classroom again and again always keeps me on the look-out for new and exciting technologies that I can introduce to my

students.

Conclusion

This paper has addressed four methods I utilize when creating activities and planning lessons. Each one was chosen with the distinct purpose of promoting positive student engagement or motivation among less enthusiastic, perhaps more reticent learners. I discussed building student confidence, utilizing collaborative learning, prioritizing fluency over accuracy, and employing technology in the classroom. I approached each topic by first discussing some of the relevant literature surrounding it, then by sharing some examples as to how I employ each method in the classroom. In no small measure, each of these techniques have helped me to bring classrooms to life that might otherwise struggle to engage. It is my hope that instructors who read this might find some of the ideas herein of some value when creating lessons plans and assessing their own approach to language teaching.

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