

英語学習者における変容的学習

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Transformative Learning among English Language Learners

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Abstract

変容的学習は、英語を学習している日本の大学生に対して潜在的に有用なフレームワークである。変容的学習は、批判的省察と内省のプロセスを通じて、視点の変化を実現できると言われている。この論文では、まず変容的学習プロセスの概要を説明し、その後 Kathleen King が ESL の成人学生を対象に行った調査をレビューする。King の調査では、参加者の英語学習に関する視点の変化が記録されている。アクションリサーチは、King のモデルに基づき実施された。この論文では、このアクションリサーチの結果を提示し、それについて論じた。

Introduction

Educators are often faced with the question of what students are actually learning in their classes. The classes have syllabuses and follow curriculums with particular learning goals and, yet, in the classroom the learning experience hardly ever goes as planned. Each student brings with them a unique set of experiences and viewpoints that, when met with the contents of a particular lesson on a particular day, allows for a unique learning experience. That is, the knowledge a student takes away from a lesson is unique to them.

A listening activity in an English class about a trip to an amusement park will bring a different stimulus to someone who has just

recently visited an amusement part compared to someone who has never been to one. A reading about medical breakthroughs in cancer treatment will have a different affect on a student whose relative is suffering from the disease compared to a student who has never had to see the effects of cancer in anyone close to them. So, prepare as a teacher may, the results of their lessons will be as varied as the people attending.

This mixing of individual experience with lesson content has the potential to bring about transformation in students and teachers aware of this potential can choose to encourage and facilitate it. The classroom can be an opportunity for students to become

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aware of, reflect on and develop their perspectives and points of view. It is to this end that the field of transformative learning can offer insight and guidance.

Transformative Learning

The founder of transformative learning, Jack Mezirow, wrote “learning is the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience to guide future action” (1991, p. 8). Transformative learning can be defined as a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, values and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open and inclusive (Hoggan et al., 2009 ; Mezirow, 2000).

According to Mezirow (1991) the process of changing our perspectives involves the revision of our meaning structures. Meaning structures include *meaning schemes* and *meaning perspectives*. *Meaning schemes* are “made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience” (Mezirow 1991, pp. 5-6). They are the perceivable signs that reveal our values and beliefs. They shape our behaviors and views, such as how we act around people from other cultures or what we think about different political parties (Taylor, 1998). A *meaning perspective* is a “collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” (Mezirow 1990, p. 2). They are the criteria of our decisions about what is “right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and

ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate” (Mezirow 1991, p.44).

Meaning perspectives are, essentially, how we see the world. They are usually acquired uncritically in childhood through acculturation and socialization, particularly through interactions with parents and educators (Taylor, 1998). Overtime these perspectives become more fixed in our psyche and change less. By the time we are adults, we have a set of meaning perspectives that help us interact with and adapt to the external world. They help us make sense of our experiences but, at the same time, they lock us into certain psychological and cultural assumptions. Regarding meaning perspectives, Taylor (1998, p. 7) says, “They are like a ‘double-edged sword’ whereby they give meaning (validation) to our experiences, but at the same time skew our reality.”

Meaning perspectives act as filters for our experiences. We interpret and give meaning to each new experience in terms of the assumptions contained within our perspectives. New experiences reinforce these perspectives or gradually stretch their boundaries depending on how congruent they are with past experiences (Taylor, 1998). However, when an experience occurs that can not be fit into an existing meaning perspective, it will either be rejected or the perspective will have to change to accommodate the new experience and this change is what constitutes transformative learning. These experiences that trigger a change in meaning perspective are what Mezirow termed disorientating dilemmas

(Mezirow & Marsick, 1978). Disorientating dilemmas often come in the form of crises, such as disease, death of a loved one, loss of a job, retirement or an accident. They can also come more gradually through a series of transformed meaning schemes and this is where a teacher aware of this process can potentially offer the classroom as a source of transformation.

Mezirow (1978) identified ten phases in the process of perspective transformation.

- A disorienting dilemma
- A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
- Provision trying of new roles
- Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's perspective

Some modern transformative learning theorists have noted that these phases are not regarded as strict steps of progression (Taylor, 1998; King, 2009). Rather, the stages

help in framing and understanding the perspective transformation experience (King, 2009).

Taylor (1998) points to three common themes in Mezirow's theory : centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse in the process of meaning structure transformation. The learning experience provides a basis for reflection and discussion. Critical reflection refers to the examination and questioning of assumptions and beliefs. Rational discourse is where transformation is developed. As Taylor says, "Discourse becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected upon and assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and where meaning schemes are meaning structures are ultimately transformed" (p. 10-11).

The Adult ESL Experience

Research on perspective change has been done on adult learners in a variety of settings such as cross-cultural settings, higher education, and medical rehabilitation (Kennedy, 1994; Taylor, 1998). Before King, however, nothing had been done with adult ESL learners (King, 2009). King noted that there seemed to be "a natural bridge between transformative learning and the adult ESL experience" (2009, p. 65). Furthermore it was observed that according to current language learning literature, language acquisition can result in changes to an individual's identity (Brown, 2000; King, 2009; Smoke, 1998).

King formed three research questions :

1. What proportion of the sampled

population experienced perspective transformation within the context of their education?

2. What common themes were evident in the perspective transformations?
3. What facilitated perspective transformation among adult ESL learners?

To answer these questions, she conducted a survey with 208 participants at three colleges in the New York City area. Additionally, she conducted 24 follow-up interviews (King, 2009). The survey that she used was based on an earlier survey that had been developed for learners in higher education called the “Learning Activities Survey” (King, 1998). The revised survey was called the “Learning Activities Survey – ESL Format” and included changes to vocabulary and considerations of the unique situation of ESL learners.

Proportion

The results of the survey showed that 66.8% of participants had experienced a transformation of perspective compared to a previously researched proportion of 32.5% among general adult learners in higher education (King 1997). This confirmed the expectations that adult ESL learners have many potential opportunities for transformative learning.

Themes

Three themes emerged from the surveys. First, it was noted that participants had changes in how they viewed language learning. King states, “This highlights the

fact that adult ESL learners come to educational experiences with preconceived ideas about the English language and learning it, and that ... the learners were engaged in evaluating their own assumptions and beliefs” (2009, p. 69). Secondly, cultural themes emerged. Participants reported changes in connection to their experience living in America, as well as the development of intercultural awareness. The third predominant theme that emerged was in connection to personal change. Participants reported gaining confidence and self-esteem as they adjusted to the new language and culture.

Facilitators

Data was gathered regarding the facilitation of perspective change in three categories: learning activities, people/support and life changes. First, eleven learning activities such as writing assignments, class discussions and worksheets were categorized into three groups, called “critical thinking”, “guided activities” and “discovering one’s voice” (p. 73). It was found that participants who experienced transformation in connection to their English learning experience referred mostly to activities in the “discovering one’s voice” category. This category included class discussions, essays, writing assignments and journaling.

Regarding people/support, many of the participants reported being supported by their teachers, friends, classmates and family. In particular, 46.8% reported that their teacher was instrumental in their

transformation of perspective. Along with teachers, friends and classmates had high percentage rates; 27.3% reported friends were instrumental and 23.7% reported that classmates were instrumental. Teachers having the highest reported percentage highlights the importance a teacher can play in the role of transformative learning. Regarding the influence of teachers, King states, “While perspective transformation has a fundamentally intellectual character, the learners seem to gain more than mere intellectual stimulation from their teachers; important to these learners were the transparency, enduring encouragement, and hope that they saw in their teachers” (p. 74).

Mezirow’s disorientating dilemma plays an important role in many models of transformative learning. This being so, participants were questioned about any important life changes that occurred during their ESL learning experiences. Many reported immigration, moving and job change as life changes that they had recently experienced. King observed that many participants recognized life changes outside of education can have an effect on educational perspective transformation.

At the conclusion of her article, King encourages other ESL teachers to perform action research with their classes and to use the “Learning Activities Survey” with their own students. I decided to do this with my own students and, in the next section, I will report on the results.

Action Research

Inspired by King’s research (2009), I decided to do action research with some of my students to find out if any of the students had experienced a transformation of perspective during class. I posed the same three research questions as King and developed a similar survey to the “Learning Activities Survey – ESL format” (King, 2009), changing some of the language and contents to be more specific for my students (see Appendix).

Participants

There were 21 participants, all women, all aged 20 – 22, all native speakers of Japanese and Japanese citizens. They were all majoring in English Communication at a women’s university in Tokyo, Japan. They were all students in my undergraduate seminar in cultural studies, and were spread over two classes. The classes are conducted in English and students work on improving their English skills while, at the same time, exploring cultural themes.

Methodology

The students were given a modified version of the “Language Activities Survey – ESL Format” as developed by King. Language learning activities mentioned in the questionnaire were modified to reflect more accurately the type of activities that are done in the class. In the “life changes” section of the questionnaire, topics such as marriage, divorce and immigration were left out as they did not seem fitting to the participants.

Additionally, some language was adjusted in consideration of the students' English level.

Proportion

Of the participants, 76.2% of the participants responded that they had experienced a change in ideas or points of view. This is congruous with Kings findings and reinforces the idea that students engaged in learning English as a second or foreign language have many opportunities for transformative learning.

Themes

The same three themes emerged in this survey as in King's research, namely, culture, language learning and personal change. 56.2% of the respondents indicated that they and experienced a change in their ideas about culture. Some areas mentioned were changes in perspectives on stereotypes, discrimination, gender and values in connection with culture, for example :

"My sense of values things that is taken for granted in Japan does not apply overseas. There are various values in the world."

"I could increase my knowledge and break my stereotypes about different topics."

31.2% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced a change in their ideas about the English language. A predominant theme in this category was a change in how they approach communication :

"At first I wanted to speak English fluently

to use at work but now I think it is important to learn English to exchange opinions with people from different countries."

"English is just a communication tool so I have changed my ideas. I now think improving our native language can help improve our English skill has well. "

18.8% percent of respondents indicated that they had experienced a personal change of some kind in relation to the class. For example :

"I think my personality has changed. I am not afraid of making mistakes compared to before."

Facilitators

In this seminar class, students research and present on topics connected to cultural studies. Each week several students present their research and then other students comment and ask questions. 82.3% of the students responded that the class presentations contributed to their change of perspective. I added the topic of presentations to the questionnaire and would classify it as an activity to be included in the category of "finding your own voice", mentioned by King. Additionally, 56.3% indicated that class discussions had contributed to their change. This topic is also included in the "finding your own voice" category. These were the primary two activities in the questionnaire that respondents chose in connection to their change of perspectives.

Regarding the people who influenced the change, both friends and classmates were chosen by 82.3% of the respondents. This number is quite high and reflects the sense of community that has developed among the students in the class. Answers in the survey indicated that many students feel that the class has a supportive and friendly environment. 75% of the respondents indicated that the teacher contributed to the change. 12.5% of the respondents wrote that their family was influential in the change even though family wasn't a category, they added it in the section titled, "other". This suggests that in future surveys, the category of family could be added in this part of the questionnaire.

Regarding life changes that influenced the change of perspective, 87.5% reported that they had experienced some kind of life change that influenced their change of perspective. 75% indicated a new relationship and 50% indicated a new job. These were the two primary changes reported though every category was selected at least once. This data reflects that there is a lot going on in students' lives outside of class that has contributed to their learning experience. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, each student comes to class with a unique set of experiences that influences their learning.

Discussion

This action research indicates that the transformative learning framework is worth studying further in relation to adult English language learners in Japan. The results of

my action research were congruous with the results found by King in her research, giving further support to the idea that perspective change is closely connected to the study of English by non-native speakers. Through their responses to the survey, many of my students demonstrated that they had undergone reflection and self-examination in relation to their class experience. They experienced changes in the way they thought about other cultures, the English language and themselves.

If the study of English by speakers of other languages has the potential to encourage transformative experiences, it is useful for educators to be aware of this process. Furthermore, it gives occasion for them to ask themselves whether changes of perspective are or could be a desired learning outcome for their classes. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, students bring a unique set of experiences with them to the classroom and their learning is naturally influenced by these experiences. The large number of students in my action research who indicated that life changes had affected their learning experience supports this claim.

Furthermore, the types of activities chosen by teachers can have an effect on transformative learning outcomes, as was demonstrated in both King's research and my action research. One thing that surprised me was the high number of my students who reported that a classmate had been a part of their perspective change. As mentioned earlier, a large amount of class time is devoted to group discussions and presentations. This

suggests that communication amongst students could be a source of future research on facilitating transformative learning in the classroom.

One potential issue with the survey is that students might have had trouble understanding the details of the survey. While students were completing the survey, some of them had questions about the meaning of some of the sentences. This suggested to me that English level of the survey could be further modified in future research.

Conclusion

In this paper, I sought to better understand the learning process of my students. I sought to know whether they had experienced changes of perspective and, if so, what were the themes of the changes and what facilitated the changes. I determined that many of the students in my classes have experienced transformative changes of perspective in relation to language, culture and their personal lives. I also learned that a frequent catalyst for this transformation was their interactions with each other. The model of transformative learning has given me much to consider, both relating to my students, and to myself as an educator. For the process of reflection and self-examination is something that we all can benefit from.

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Appendix

Survey based on the “Learning Activities Survey – ESL Format”, developed by King (2009).

1. Since you began taking this seminar, do you think any of your ideas or points of view have changed? (Your ideas about culture, the English language, your native language or country, or yourself are some possible topics)

Yes

No

2. Please describe the change of idea or point of view.

3. Here is a list of some of the changes you may have experienced.

Please circle any that apply to you.

a. Something happened that made me think about the way I usually act.

b. Something happened to me that made me think about my ideas about social roles.
(Examples of social roles include how a man or woman should act, how an adult or child should act, how a teacher or student should act, and so on)

c. As I thought about these things (a. and b.) I realized that I did not agree with my previous beliefs or role expectations anymore.

d. Or instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.

e. I realized that other people also think about their beliefs.

f. I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.

g. I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.

h. I tried out new roles so I would become more comfortable or confident in them.

i. I tried to think of a way to try these new ways of acting.

j. I gathered the information I needed to try these new ways of acting.

k. I began to think about people’s reactions to my new behavior.

l. I took action and started regularly these new ways of acting.

m. I don’t identify with any of the above statements.

4. If you have experienced a change of ideas or points of view, please do question 5. If not, please go to question 9.

5. What did this seminar have to do with your ideas or views changing?

6. Many things in class can influence a change of ideas or points of view. Please check all the things that influenced your change.

Class discussions

Group projects

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal journal | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worksheets | <input type="checkbox"/> Class activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Other : |

7. Did a person influence your change? Circle all that apply

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Another student | <input type="checkbox"/> Your teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Your partner (boyfriend/girlfriend) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other : | |

8. Did an important change in your life influence the change? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> New relationship | <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a loved one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Moving | <input type="checkbox"/> New job or change of job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> End of a relationship | <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness | <input type="checkbox"/> Other : |

9. Which of the following have you experienced while taking this seminar? Check all that apply :

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class discussions | <input type="checkbox"/> Group projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing assignments | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal journal | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading assignments |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worksheets | <input type="checkbox"/> Class activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening activities | <input type="checkbox"/> New relationship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Death of a loved one | <input type="checkbox"/> Moving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> New job or change of job | <input type="checkbox"/> End of a relationship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loss of job | <input type="checkbox"/> Sickness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other : | |

10. How long have you lived in Japan?

11. What is your nationality?

12. What is your age?

Would you be willing to be interviewed about this topic? If so, please write your name :

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