

## 論文

# An Investigation into the Language Café – A Needs Analysis

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### 要旨

第一言語での会話でさえ、会話の始め方や継続は困難な場合が多くある。ましてや、L2（第二言語）での会話となれば、語彙の不足や不安といった要因でより困難なものとなる。『Language Café』と同様の試みは日本の他の多くの大学にも見られ、さらに拡大しつつあり、『Global Lounge』『Chat Space』などといった名前で知られるものである。それらの空間は堅苦しいものではなく、間違いを正すということよりも流暢に話し、自由な会話を楽しむことに重点を置いている。ここでは強要はなく英語で会話をするように自然と促されているのだ。

愛知大学では特に昼食時の『Language Café』に於いて、堅苦しい教室とは異なり、教師と生徒がくつろいだ環境の中で会話することができる、『言語実体験』をする場所を生徒に与えている。

この研究は、そのニーズの分析であり、“Language Menu”（会話補助ツール）の必要性の裏付けである。

- ・カフェの状況に関する、教師と生徒の現在時における見解
- ・カフェ参加生徒の動機付け要因は？生徒を参加に促す為に必要な策とは
- ・カフェでの会話促進に役立つサポートツールの構築

キーワード：内因性動機付け、言語不安、フリートーク、生徒主導型会話、コミュニケーション意欲

### **Introduction and Investigative Aims**

Even in one's first language, initiating and continuing conversation can be difficult. When it comes to speaking in an L2, the difficulty may be magnetized by any number of factors ranging from a lack of vocabulary to social anxiety. The 'Language Café' is a growing concept across universities in Japan. It is known by other names such as 'Global Lounge' and 'Chat Space' depending on the university, yet they all contain similar characteristics – those being its informal setting, its emphasis on building fluency through 'free conversation' rather than language correction, and L2 use being encouraged rather than demanded. During lunchtime especially, the café is seen to be a place where students and language instructors can talk in a relaxed environment giving the student an authentic language experience free from the formal constraints of the classroom.

This investigation is concerned heavily with Needs Analysis and determining more specifically a potential need for the creation of a 'Language Menu' to help scaffold conversation.

- What are both teachers' and students' current perceptions of the café's state and success?
- What are the motivating factors for student attendance at the café and how could non-attendees be encouraged to attend?
- Would more structure in terms of materials to support conversation be a welcome addition to the café?

Keywords: intrinsic motivation, language anxiety, free conversation, student-led talk, willingness to communicate

### **University Context**

This entire study took place on the Toyohashi campus of Aichi University, a private university in Japan. The campus has two faculties – the Faculty of Letters (FL) which

includes the Humanities department, and the Faculty of Regional Policy (FR). Around 700 students from both faculties have a compulsory English class in the first year of a four-year degree course. The students have a plethora of classes in their first year before specializing from their second year - only around 30 students will specialize in English Language study offered by the Contemporary International English (CIE) section of the Humanities Department - only students who belong to the FL have this option.

## **Students**

The 100 students who participated in this investigation were all FL students in their first year. Due to the logistics of the situation and student progression trends, it can be established that less than 10% of the students will major in English - the students are potential English majors. They are currently being taught by myself at the university for 90 minutes per week in ‘Communicative English.’ The participants are in classes of 25-30 students where the focus is on speaking practice in small groups. They are all between the ages of 18-20 and will have had at least six years English instruction through the grammar based Japanese school system. Upon completion of the course, the students will be given a grade by the teacher based on class performance and will earn credit needed for their academic progress.

## **Teachers**

The university employs on campus four full-time L1 English speakers Professor X is a tenured Professor and supervises the other three. Professor Z, Professor Y and myself are all on temporary contracts, and are responsible for teaching 10 x 90 minute classes per week over two fifteen-week semesters per year. All members seem to be motivated in their daily teaching lives, and were keen participants in this investigation. Teachers generally attend the café once or twice per week.

## **The Language Café – The Current Situation**

The Language Café (from here on referred to as the café) consists of four large tables with seating provided for up to thirty people. In the centre of the room is a self-service area for

making tea and coffee which is provided free of charge. There is a television that can be used for playing DVDs, and music is often played quietly on a CD player in order to create a café-style atmosphere. The seating area is surrounded on all sides by DVDs and books that can be rented by students, therefore it a public space that is not only accessed for the purpose of the café. The café/rental-library is open five days a week from 9am until 7pm yet the ‘free English conversation’ times are four days a week for 30 minutes around lunchtime on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

Theoretically, the café could be attended by anyone from the surrounding general public to retired professors, in practice however, it is attended by students of the university as well as university staff members. Attendance to the lunchtime sessions fluctuates throughout the academic year, the second semester ‘slump’ that Professor X mentions leaves the café with low attendance levels from both teachers and students on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. It seems from my own experiences that Mondays attract the largest number of attendees. In the first semester (there are two per year in Japan), a number of CIE second-year students were in attendance however in the second semester they stopped coming. With the exception of three ‘regulars’ (two of whom were interviewed as part of this study), attendees are predominantly first year female FL students with comparable language ability. Mondays often see all four teachers in attendance plus a part-time teacher, Tuesdays and Wednesdays usually only has one or two teachers present.

## **Theoretical Context**

My initial reading was inspired by an urge to discover why or why not students were entering the café. The language space was completely free - with the exception of books and DVDs on the shelves - of any materials, and if they were to be developed what form should they take. A lack of attendance was becoming a growing issue within the department, and rather than rush into asking questions based on hunches, I decided a clear theoretical foundation was required on which to base the research. Dornyei (2001 p253) mentions the ‘conceptualization of willingness to communicate’ (WTC) and a brief exploration of this introduced to me a body of thought and work from which I could find answers to the following questions.

- Would it be possible to pinpoint sociological factors, whether they are determined by the student's age or peer groups that affect their attendance level?

Shamim (2006 p134) speaks of the 'front-zone' in the classroom, the area that is 'conducive to learning' where students with 'initial motivation' will sit. The attendees at the café certainly belonged to this group of students. She also speaks of them having a 'stronger personality' than the 'back-zone' students, however I wanted through my research to discover if there were social groups at play that were in relation to extra-curricular activities such as sports/arts clubs. There are no formal meetings held on campus during the lunch period, but perhaps these social groups had formed meaning that the café just was not the 'cool place to be?'

- Does the fact that the café is free of any assessment relinquish motivation to attend?

Skehan's (1989) 'Carrot and Stick Hypothesis' discussed by Ellis (1994 p513) makes a relation between an 'incentive to learn' and the motivation of the students to communicate. Whether such a 'carrot' existed in the café was of debate amongst teachers. A previously employed teacher had created a stamp card to encourage attendance however whether the completion of this card had any relation to the student's final assessment was unclear, and seemed to be at the discretion of the teacher. The use of the stamp card seemed childish without a specific incentive to have it completed. I sought in my interview research with colleagues to determine whether a clearer incentive was needed to encourage attendance. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) cited in Ellis (1994 p514) claim that 'once any chance for receiving reward is eliminated, learners may cease applying extra effort.' However, the situation at hand was not that of a classroom and I sought to determine whether these 'instrumental factors' that 'rewarded' students should be carried over from the classroom into the less formal atmosphere of the café.

- Have the students developed a 'far-sighted somewhat vague long-term objective related to using English for international/intercultural communication' (Yashima et al 2004)?

The idea that practice will improve speaking performance is well established yet as

Dornyei (2005) states, if teachers and educational establishments do not go beyond merely providing the opportunity to practice without establishing the benefit to the student then the following could occur:

“It is not uncommon to find people who tend to avoid entering L2 communication situations even if they possess a high level of communicative competence. This implies that there is a further layer of mediating factors between the competence to communicate and putting this competence into practice” (2005: 207).

However, it is not solely the extrinsic influences of rewards that will develop WTC but as Brown (2002:12) states ‘a more powerful category of reward is one which is intrinsically driven within the learner’ therefore nurturing and developing this ‘self-rewarding behaviour’ would mean any extrinsic rewards would be unnecessary.

More culturally specifically, Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al (2004) at Kansai University in Japan conducted research that showed that students who were more interested in international issues, and how they could use English in the international community were more likely to have WTC. Her work lead her to coin the phrase ‘international posture’ and the idea of students standing up in an international community with English as their tool for communication in this ‘broader future context’ struck me as being important for developing WTC. As Yashima states, ‘international posture influences motivation, which in turn, predicts proficiency and L2 communication confidence’ (2002: 63). A lack of this long-term motivation would certainly detract from student attendance at the café.

- Does the prospect of ‘free-talk’ within the café create anxiety that deters the student from attending?

Krashen’s (1981:38) ‘low-anxiety environment’ that ‘is easy to say but difficult to provide’ led me to try to realize whether the idea of being in a space with your teachers and communicating in a foreign language at lunchtime was an overwhelming concept to the students. Was there a ‘debilitating anxiety’ (Ellis 1994:484) that was stopping the students from attending? The café had never had any premise other than to come and talk with teachers and peers about anything that you desired, but from my experience the teachers seemed to be dominating the conversation, and students were relegated in the conversation to being respondents and not initiators. I also sought to understand who it was the students

wanted to engage in conversation with each other or their foreign teachers that would give them an ‘authentic language experience.’ Lightbown and Spada (1999:51) discuss the ‘assumption’ that learners who ‘seek out opportunities to interact with speakers of the language are highly motivated to learn’ but does this necessarily mean these speakers have to be L1 speakers of the language? It seemed from my own experiences in the café that some form of language support was required to avoid the conversation between students being in their L1 and for the teacher interrogation to cease.

## **Research Methods**

### **Exploratory Interviews**

I initially held recorded interviews with two female students who are both 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. Student H is an English Literature Major who attends the café regularly and had done throughout her three years studying at the university. Student S is a Contemporary International English Major who also regularly attended the café. I hoped to discover why they came and simply why they believed others did not. Also, as frankly paying customers at the university were they satisfied with the service that was currently being offered? Both of these interviews took place in the café at lunchtime. I approached them as I found them both articulate and motivated to communicate, I was aware that speaking with them may not help to any great extent to understand non-attendance. These interviews were not recorded as the students while willing, seemed uncomfortable with the idea of being recorded. I therefore, have not included an appendix of their sample comments.

I also held interviews with Professors X, Y and Z that were primarily focused on the current state of the café, their perception of what its function is, and also how it could be improved. These interviews were held in each professor’s office during the afternoon.

All of these interviews were exploratory in nature to gather qualitative data in a semi-structured manner that would allow me to create a more structured written questionnaire that would be aimed at both student attendees and non-attendees of the café.

## Written Questionnaire

The written questionnaire was created based upon the theoretical context and the exploratory interviews. I wanted to be able to create a questionnaire that would yield the ‘rich’ data (Dornyei 2003:14) that qualitative research could not. I also wanted to make sure the students avoided any ‘fatigue effect’ (Dornyei 2003:14) by making it long enough to be of value but easy enough to avoid the negative influences of tedium. The questionnaire was given to exactly 100 students at the beginning of class across three different classes. All students were 1<sup>st</sup> years as described in the ‘Students’ section of this paper. The questionnaire was fully bilingual, and students were encouraged to write in whichever language they felt comfortable using. All translation of written comments from Japanese to English was done by myself.

## Results

### Teacher Interviews

My first interview was with Professor X who is in a position of authority at the university. His comments showed a lack of change and more pointedly a lack of direction as to how the café should progress. He did mention how the first year of the café’s existence was ‘pretty structured’ but that over time it had changed to its present day structureless form. Two areas particularly interested me, his comments regarding the stamp card and how it was ‘a push thing’ that may at first be an extrinsic influence (Skehan 1989 in Ellis 1994) but later could develop into an intrinsic motivating factor. Also he provided insight into how the students interacted with each other with each other, and were perhaps reluctant to engage each other in L2 without the ‘push’ of the teacher.

Professor Z had perhaps the most experience of café attendance and his observations were most insightful. He spoke of a ‘psychological barrier’ that many students faced that reminded me of factors relating to WTC and how MacIntyre (2007 p565) determined a ‘convergence of psychological processes underlying communication’ that were necessary for conversation to flow. He commented on how the students were ‘reluctant to initiate’ and were ‘misinterpreting’ the café by attending and conversing in their L1 when teachers



were not present. Again, I sought to confirm ‘who’ the students were seeking to converse with in the café. Professor Z seemed stricter in his insistence of an ‘all-English’ environment within the café, but also more encouraging of Yashima (2002)’s ‘international posture.’ He believes the café is a wasted opportunity for the students.

Professor Y offered fascinating insight into the motivating factors he perceived to be involved. He sided with Brown’s (2002) idea of a strong intrinsic instrument being required and nurturing this through broadening ‘cultural content leading to cultural understanding’ He was strongly against any stamp-card system or other extrinsic influence on the students to encourage attendance. He was the least enthusiastic of the interviewees in regards to the notion of materials to support conversation, and seemed to support the concept of ‘free speaking’ in the café.

## **Student Interviews**

Student S’s comment that her ‘English improved so now is more fun’ showed that she holds value in the café, and she also mentioned the benefits of having connections with English teachers. Her main complaints were of a lack of teachers on certain days leading to many students reverting to their L1 of Japanese. Her comments helped me to concentrate the later questionnaire on with whom the students were coming to communicate.

Student H similarly praised the benefits of the café by saying ‘it enhanced my English ability’ and that it provided a ‘student community.’ Both students were happy with the current state of the café and had no particular ideas in relation to how it could be improved. They were both open to the idea of more structure to support conversation, yet both stressed the ‘if necessary’ that could in some ways detract from ‘real’ spoken discourse. I felt that Student S and H had the ‘international posture’ that Yashima (2002) believed was key to being a motivated speaker of an L2.

## **Written Questionnaires**

Of the 100 participants in the questionnaire, 23 had been to the café during the semester which was slightly higher than I had anticipated due to my own observations. Of those 23,

20 attended the café to speak with ‘foreign teachers in a foreign language’ being the main reason for attendance followed by 13 who were attending to speak with other students in a foreign language. Firth and Wagner (1997:291) criticized ‘the mindset that views learners/non-natives as inherently defective communicators’, and it would seem that while the students have the motivation to attend, as Professor Y mentioned there is a ‘psychological block’ that was affecting their speaking performance beyond ability.

This ‘block’ seemed to be a lack of confidence that was further enhanced by a social anxiety of being in a situation where one is being asked to communicate freely in L2. The 58 of 77 non attendees to the café who ‘lack confidence in my English speaking ability’ or the 46 of 77 who believe ‘free talk is too difficult’ clearly represent a need for some structure to be put in place to scaffold conversation in an environment that is uncomfortable for students.

Other observations from the questionnaire showed the formation of peer groups at lunch time which is completely understandable at the age of the students, with 21% who took part in the survey spending the lunch hour with others as part of their extra-curricular clubs. Taking in to account that the students had only been attending the university for 7-8 months, I feared that asocial behaviour may be detracting from the café attendance, however only 4% of the students wished to be alone at lunchtime. The 47% of students who were either eating in the classrooms or in the eating area near the convenience store, could just as very well easily have lunch in the café. In short, potential attendees were on campus during lunch.

## **Conclusion and Proposal for a ‘Language Menu’**

### **Shortcomings**

An area in which I failed to gather any valuable data was on the extrinsic motivating factor of the stamp card. Professor X had concluded that an internal review of this system was necessary as it had questionable elements in regards to assessment. The ‘nudge’ he mentions was something that needed to be discussed with my colleagues and superiors, and could well be related to any further investigations into the café. I felt it had been an

interesting point for discussion during the initial exploratory qualitative interviews with teachers, but the division and inconsistencies of teacher practice meant that decisions needed to be made at management level.

## **The ‘Language Menu’ Proposal**

The concept of ‘foreign language anxiety’ has been around for decades (Horwitz et al 1986), and explorations into Japanese ESL classrooms is nothing revolutionary either (Aida 1994). However, less is known of the middle ground between the classroom and the learner’s private world where L2 usage is offered a chance to be free of the contrived situation of the classroom. From my investigation, while I believe it is an enriching experience for the learner, I believe I have proved it to be an unrealistic aim. The concept of spontaneous conversation with peers and teachers while enviable, it ‘poses a threat to self-esteem because it deprives the learners of their normal means of communication.’ (Horwitz et al 1986).

I therefore propose a ‘Language Menu.’ The menu will offer support to students who are feeling anxious, provide them with prompts to initiate conversation and also provide simple ideas for the continuation of conversation. It will serve to be seasonal in the topics it introduces, manageable for the students in the level of difficulty of content yet suitable to their age and immediate environment (the life of a university student.) I propose for this menu to be placed on tables, and similarly to how a menu may be used at a café or restaurant, only looked at if desired or required by the learner. I also propose that copies be made for learners to take away in order to feel comfortable with the content.

## **Final Comments**

Yashima's international posture (2002) may exist in a great number of the students at the university, and its fostering in the environment of the Language Café is extremely important. However, the idea of 'free conversation' where the students are initiating with fellow students and teachers alike without any means of material support is a level that is unattainable for the majority of 1st year students due to foreign language anxiety. Some form of support is needed as an option for the students to turn to in order to stimulate

'semi-natural' conversation in Krashen's (1981) 'low-anxiety environment.'

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### Appendix

#### Quantitative Data Results from 100 Students

Have you been to the Language Café at lunchtime this semester?

How many times have you been there?

Once 5	Under five 9	Five to ten 3	Over ten 6
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Reasons for Attendance (multiple choices allowed for the 23)

To talk to foreign teachers in a foreign language	20
To talk to other students in a foreign language	13
To listen to others talk	9
To talk to others in Japanese	3
To quietly eat lunch	1
Others	4

Reasons for Non-Attendance (multiple choices for the 77)

I lack confidence in my ability to take part in conversation	58
Free talk makes me anxious	46
I want to speak in Japanese at lunchtime	31
The time is inconvenient for me	20
I'm too busy	20
I want to be alone at lunchtime	4
I'm not interested in hearing or speaking a foreign language at the cafe	4
I don't understand what the café is	2

98% of students normally eat lunch on campus

21% are involved in non-formal social group activity