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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

A study of strategies used by Japanese adults to learn English in
New Zealand, with particular reference to perception and
production of difficult phonemes

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of strategies used for learning English by a number of Japanese adults in Wellington, New Zealand. It reports the participants' own perception of their selection and use of strategies, as well as quantitative and qualitative data which I collected in a structured research programme.

For the more formal questionnaires I mainly used the 50-strategy version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) translated into Japanese by Ban and Shishido in Oxford (1994). English pronunciation tests consisting of two perception and three production tests were administered to look for any relationship between the use of strategies and the proficiency level of the learners. Three independent judges (all native speakers of New Zealand English) assessed the production tests. I personally conducted in Japanese all the one-to-one interviews (which proved to be most productive of unusual facts and original views), and administered all the pronunciation tests in English.

Three of the fifty SILL items were discarded because they were not consistent with the rest of the items in their respective subscales. After the adjustment all six subscales were deemed to be reliable. The scores of the three judges were found to be consistent with each other. The scores of the overall pronunciation test and the adjusted SILL were then analysed using SPSS. The results of the interviews were analysed according to the six subcategories of the SILL.

Analysis of participants' performance in the SILL revealed the low use of memory strategies and high and medium use of all other strategy categories. The English pronunciation total scores were found to distribute fairly symmetrically. Significant relationships were found between proficiency in pronunciation and the use of cognitive strategies. The responses to interviews proved that the participants misunderstood some of the SILL questions and that some of the SILL questions were unsuitable to participants with Japanese language backgrounds.

The principal conclusion of the research is that each learner chooses learning strategies according to the needs and purposes of their current situation, and that past success and failure influence the choice of strategies.

Much of the material may simply reinforce knowledge and experience already widely held, but it is hoped that there may be some facets which may be helpful to those actively engaged as teachers or in research not only in the specific areas of Japanese people learning English in New Zealand but also in the wider context of ESL and EFL.

Declaration

I declare that:

This thesis is the result of my own unaided research, except where otherwise acknowledged.

This thesis has not been presented for any other degree.

This thesis is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any other degree.

Signed

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.....

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