

KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

Review of The Impact of Learning Contexts on Proficiency, Attitudes, and L2 Communication : Creating an Imagined International Community (Tomoko Yashima and Lori Zenuk-Nishide, System, 36, 566-585.)

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 関西外国語大学・関西外国語大学短期大学部 公開日: 2018-10-10 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 豊田, 順子 メールアドレス: 所属: 関西外国語大学短期大学部
URL	https://doi.org/10.18956/00007834

Review of The impact of learning contexts on proficiency,
attitudes, and L2 communication: Creating an imagined
international community (Tomoko Yashima and Lori
Zenuk-Nishide, *System*, 36, 566–585.)

Junko Toyoda

Due to the perennial calls over the years for communication-focused teaching, the question of what learning context best fosters Japanese students' communicative competence has greatly attracted the attention of Japanese EFL practitioners, researchers, and educational administrators. For the most part, this research has investigated individual differences in the linguistic development of second language (L2) learners, the four major skill areas (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) mostly in English, and attitudes, motivation, and affect in contextual settings. However, such studies have usually been conducted at sites temporarily and specifically created for research. Meanwhile, neither the linguistic nor the non-linguistic aspects of L2 learning have been fully explored in well-established L2 learning programs with specific educational characteristics.

What kind of L2 learning classroom context available in Japan is better for learning, as compared to others, remains an unanswered empirical question. To answer this question, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) analyzed the effects of learning contexts on proficiency development along with changes in attitudes and communication behaviors in an L2 context by making comparisons between Study-Abroad and At Home programs and between content-based and grammar-translation instruction in the same Japanese high school. By comparing individual differences in these different learning contexts over two and a half years, this longitudinal study showed how L2 proficiency, willingness to communicate (WTC) in an L2, which is a person's trait-like enduring variable in an L2, L2 frequency of communication, and international posture develop, thus revealing the different influences of learning contexts on Japanese L2 learners.

The study assessed the linguistic aspects (TOEFL scores) and non-linguistic aspects (WTC in an L2, L2 frequency of communication, and international posture) of the learners, who were studying in the different programs and courses described above, during their first and

third years in high school. Using a repeated measures mixed-model ANOVA, the results of the questionnaires conducted during Time 1 (first year) and Time 2 (third year) were compared within the group factors for the analysis of the learners' development. In addition, cluster analyses revealed different profiles of development within the At-Home student group. Finally, the results of the descriptive questionnaire were analyzed based on an open-coding qualitative approach.

The program and courses targeted for this research broadly represent the mainstream learning contexts and features available to high school students in Japan today. Students in the At Home program had two options. One was communication-focused learning, which uses a content-based curriculum taught by a native speaker of English. This course provides students with opportunities to engage in project-based learning (PBL). PBL requires students to prepare a speech in English and deliver it at the Model United Nations (MUN); this is a two- or three-day event in which pairs of high school students act as country representatives and deliver a presentation in English on a social issue they learned about and researched through the school curriculum. The other is a grammar-translation option with a smaller number of communicative-based lessons, and it is aimed at preparation for university entrance examinations. Both options provide students with a short Study-Abroad experience. Meanwhile, the students in the Study-Abroad program experienced a year in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, or the US and chose either one of the At-Home options when they were in Japan. The features of such learning contexts provide rich resources for researching the mainstream learning contexts in Japan.

The paper presents an empirical study, and it includes a literature review along with a results and a discussion section that deal with Study-Abroad experiences, the influence of learning contexts, and the non-linguistic aspects of L2 learning, including international posture and WTC.

First, several studies have examined the effects of Study-Abroad experiences on the acquisition of communicative competencies such as reading (Dewey, 2004), speaking (Lafford, 1995, 2004), and writing (Sasaki, 2004, 2007), and all of these have shown that Study-Abroad experiences are more advantageous than non-Study-Abroad alternatives. However, few studies have focused on the effect of Study-Abroad experiences on attitudes, motivation, and cultural awareness. Thus, this study is valuable in that it reports both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the effects of Study-Abroad experiences.

Moreover, there have been a few empirical studies on the influence of learning contexts.

For example, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) investigated the influences of contexts (immersion vs. non-immersion) and found that learners in immersion programs, who received much greater exposure to the L2 than those in non-immersion programs, tended to have an advantage in terms of motivation, attitudes, and affect in the L2.

Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide's (2008) study tried to explore the influence of learning contexts on a wider variety of learning variables in EFL situations. In particular, they found that, among the many non-linguistic aspects of L2 acquisition, WTC and international posture were key variables that influenced EFL learners' communication behavior.

On the other hand, the authors make a clear distinction between Gardner's (1985) integrativeness and international posture, both of which are predictors for WTC.

The integrativeness construct reflects L2 learners' WTC in the target language community. In EFL situations, specifically, international posture was suggested by Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al. (2004) as an alternative to integrativeness, as it captures development in intercultural sensitivity or awareness, both of which influence WTC and motivation in the L2. That is, L2 learners with an interest in international affairs are more likely to use L2 to interact with people in an international community.

The results of the study under review reveal three important findings. First, similar to past research findings, Study-Abroad learners held a greater advantage compared to At-Home learners in terms of both linguistic and non-linguistic development, with the Study-Abroad group achieving a higher level of international posture, frequency of communication, and L2 proficiency compared to the At-Home group within the period of a whole academic year. Moreover, the Study-Abroad participants showed greater changes in attitude and communication in the L2.

Another finding, which may in fact exceed expectations, is that the At-Home group that took CBI courses showed a developmental profile similar to that of the Study-Abroad group. The authors point out that, in a learning context where the students study the L2 in order to prepare for the MUN activity through two and a half years of CBI, these learners tended to show increased levels in terms of frequency of communication, international posture, and L2 proficiency, similar to the Study-Abroad group.

Finally, although the learning contexts and amounts of exposure were quite different between the two groups, both groups did not show much developmental change in terms of WTC at the end of the academic year. This result indicates that WTC, a personal trait-like variable, does not fluctuate even if the learner undergoes influential experiences in the L2 or

L2 community.

As a whole, this study provides valid and informative empirical data for EFL practitioners, researchers, and educational administrators who are seeking to create effective communication-based L2 instructional settings, especially in high schools. Detailed descriptions of the data provided in this paper tell us the number of class hours and amounts and types of L2 exposure as well as the types of teaching methodologies necessary for young L2 learners to achieve certain levels of communicative competence. In addition, the wide range of teaching approaches under consideration, including Study-Aboard, CBI, Grammar-Translation Instruction (GTI) for entrance exams, Theme-based Instruction (TBI), and Project-based Instruction (PBI), all of which have been implemented in high schools in Japan, was empirically assessed. Consequently, the results of this study, which was conducted in collaboration with a well-established program at the same site over an entire year, are more valid than those of short-term studies that examine learning contexts created specifically for the purpose of research.

This study is also valuable in that it suggests some important teaching implications. Although the amount of exposure to authentic L2 communication inside and outside of school is essential for developing both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of L2 learning, the amount of L2 exposure contexts or programs being studied would need to include clear objectives for using the L2 in order to enable learners to fully participate in the target community. This is essential for creating successful L2 learning contexts. These can be created easily if the learners are able to study in the target language community. However, even in EFL situations, where L2 learners have little access to authentic L2 communication, such a learning context can be created through the integration of CBI and TBI in such a way that learners learn the L2 for the clear purpose of using it in an imagined international community such as MUN. I highly recommend this paper not only as a model empirical study conducted in a school setting but also as a guide to communication-based teaching for large groups of L2 learners.

References

- Baker, S. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2000). The role of gender and immersion in communication and second language orientations. *Language Learning, 50*, 311-341.
- Dewey, D. P. (2004). A comparison of reading development by learners of Japanese in intensive domestic immersion and study abroad contexts. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 26*, 303-327.

- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Lafford, B. A. (1995). Getting into, through, and out of a survival situation: A comparison of communicative strategies used by students studying Spanish abroad and at home. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context*. (pp. 97–121). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Lafford, B. A. (2004). The effect of the context of learning on the use of communication strategies by learners of Spanish as a second language. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 26, 201–225.
- Sasaki, M. (2004). A multiple-data analysis of the 3.5-year development of EFL student writers. *Language Learning*, 54, 525–582.
- Sasaki, M. (2007). Effects of study-abroad experiences on EFL writers: A multiple-data analysis. *Modern Language Journal*, 91, 602–620.
- Yashima, T. (2002). Willingness to communicate in a second language: The Japanese EFL context. *Modern Language Journal*, 86, 54–66.
- Yashima, T., & Zenuk-Nishide, L. (2008). The impact of learning contexts on proficiency, attitudes, and L2 communication: Creating an imagined international community. *System*, 36, 566–585.
- Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004). Influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and L2 communication. *Language Learning*, 54, 119–152.

(とよだ・じゅんこ 短期大学部准教授)

