Communication Strategy Research among Japanese EFL Learners

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This research represents a year-long longitudinal study into the affects of communication strategy instruction on Japanese EFL learners’ speaking proficiency. The objective was the replication of Nakatani’s 2005 paper examining the extent of communication strategy use on Japanese EFL learners’ speaking proficiency. The research replicated Nakatani’s paper in terms of research objectives, methodological procedures, and teaching targets. Additionally, it examined the extent communication strategy-based instruction influenced Japanese EFL learners in their attempts to overcome linguistic barriers. Unlike much of the previous research, often conducted with task-determined activities, this research paper evaluated the relationship between communication strategies and their application during authentic interaction. Adhering to Nakatani’s strategy training, learners participating in the experiment group received additional instruction on CS use and its practical benefits, in addition to standard English language instruction. The findings indicate clearly that influence of prominent socio-cultural factors have to be considered in order to maximize the full effectiveness of CS strategy use. It is proposed this results from an over-reliance on reduction-type communication strategies due to cognitive retrieval difficulties stemming from socio-cultural influences.

Here and There: An Authentic Online Orientation Program

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Students preparing for study abroad often find themselves facing many unknowns; not only about study but about the basics of life in a foreign country. The ubiquity of Internet-mediated communication tools provides a useful forum for relieving this anxiety through communication with faculty at the destination school prior to departure. Faculty and graduate students at a Japanese university and its sister school in the United States collaborated to create and administer a pilot orientation program to prepare Japanese students for study abroad, connecting them directly with graduate students at the destination university working as part of their CALL pedagogy practicum. The course used a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online communication and a wide variety of pedagogical tools, focused around a moodle and the use of Skype. Students had first-hand, real-time access to authentic information about all aspects of their upcoming study-abroad experience, from classes to dorm life to information about the city in which the university is located. This presentation will describe the planning and implementation of the course’s first two years, focusing on administrative and teaching issues and continuing implementation of lessons learned, with an eye towards continued improvement of the online orientation course. The presentation will also touch on the outcomes of the course, both as a cultural orientation and language course for the Japanese students, and as a teaching practicum for the instructors in the United States.