

Unfolding Literature on Transfer of Learning for Second Language Classrooms in Japan

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Abstract

From 2022, Japanese high schools are supposed to follow some changes in the new course of study. One of the biggest challenges for high school teachers is to adapt their classes to what is called active learning. Of three components of such learning (i.e., proactive learning, interactive learning, and authentic learning), this article focuses on authenticity of learning and the principles underlying it, considering transfer of learning as its main component. This paper discusses how transfer of learning can be achieved in L2 classroom contexts, especially in compliance with the regulations contained in the course of study. The paper concludes with possible future directions for research.

Key words: active learning, authentic learning, transfer of learning

1. Introduction

In 2018, MEXT [Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology] amended Japan's course of study for high school, and accordingly, Japanese high schools are required to follow and adapt to these changes from 2022. Beside the newly introduced three pillars of learning which attracted special attention from educators, another key concept appearing in the course of study is active learning, which is described in other words as "syutai teki, taiwa teki de, fukai manabi." Although I originally interpreted them as "spontaneous, dialogic, and deep learning" (Ogawa, 2020), it turns out that MEXT translated them in 2021 as

“proactive, interactive, and authentic learning” (p. 8).

In order to elucidate basic assumptions and principles underlying these three elements of active learning, I have so far comprehensively looked at significant roles of dialogue, curriculum and systems of schools, and types of knowledge developed in active learning contexts from a constructivist perspective. Understanding the implications of these concepts is, as I described in Ogawa (2020), particularly important for pre- and in-service teachers who want to understand what MEXT means by active learning.

From an English educational point of view, however, it remains to be pursued how these basic principles of active learning should be integrated in a language classroom, especially concerning the authentic part of active learning. This is because little of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature has dealt with, or emphasized, authenticity of learning in terms of “transfer of learning” (James, 2018). In referring to this term, I will use the acronym “ToL” so as to distinguish it from a concept more familiar to language educators and researchers, language transfer, which I shall refer to as “LT”. These two concepts should not be confused; I will define them in the next section.

According to the foreign language education section in the new course of study, one of three main sets of goals is, “as well as to deepen students’ understanding of foreign language sound, vocabulary, expression, grammar, and how language works, *to acquire skills of putting the knowledge to practical use in actual communication* which involves listening, reading, speaking, and writing, according appropriately to purpose, occasion, and situation” (emphasis added and translated by the author from MEXT, p. 163).¹

Despite comparatively little interest in ToL on the part of SLA researchers, as is clearly shown in MEXT’s goal, it is very important to

1 The original Japanese text: “外国語の音声や語彙、表現、文法、言語の働きなどの理解を深めるとともに、これらの知識を、聞くこと、読むこと、話すこと、書くことによる実際のコミュニケーションにおいて、目的や場面、状況などに応じて適切に活用できる技能を身に付けるようにする。”

consider how learners can retrieve and make best use of school knowledge and trained skills in practical situations as well as what fosters this type of learning. Therefore, in this paper, considering it as a major factor of authentic learning, I will focus on basic ideas and principles of ToL. After clarifying the definition of ToL, I would like to approach the philosophy of ToL from a broad perspective first, followed by an SLA-specific viewpoint. Later in this report, I will make a brief discussion on the existing research and possible future studies concerning the new course of study.

2. Defining Transfer

In order to distinguish two main types of transfer, I would like to emphasize different terms for them: transfer of learning (ToL) and language transfer (LT). Although I will briefly explain both in this section so as to avoid confusion of ToL with LT, the focus of this paper is ToL, and an extended discussion of the relationship between ToL (a concept familiar to researchers in general education) and LT (a concept specific to SLA) is beyond the scope of this paper.

2.1. Transfer of Learning (ToL)

ToL in this paper refers to the transition of knowledge and skills from a learning situation to a performance situation. This happens when learners successfully retrieve what they have learned before and make effective use of the knowledge and skills in new contexts which are somehow disconnected from the learning contexts. This type of transfer is also referred to as generalization of knowledge and transcendence according to different researchers (e.g., Engeström, 1991; Poehner, 2007).

According to Bransford and Schwartz (1999), ToL has several subtypes in terms of from where to where; "from one problem to another within a course; from one course to another; from one school year to the next; and from their years in school to their years in the workplace" (p. 61). Analyzing characteristics of ToL, Merriam and Leahy (2005), in reference

to Detterman (1993, cited in Merriam and Leahy, 2005, pp. 3-4) introduce three sets of transfer types:

- Near and far transfer;
- Specific and nonspecific transfer;
- Deep structure and surface structure transfer.²

Merriam and Leahy (2005, pp 3-4) explain that near transfer means that learning context and retrieval context are similar, that specific transfer means transfer of the literal and almost the same knowledge, and that deep structure transfer means transfer of the meanings and functions rather than forms and configurations.

In this report, among such traits of ToL, I would like to comprehensively cover both near and far transfer, both specific and nonspecific transfer, and both deep and surface knowledge and skills without precisely distinguishing them from each other. However, when I talk about transfer in this paper, I mean ToL between school and outside school contexts rather than between one course and another or between learning and test contexts. In section 4 where I discuss ToL in SLA contexts, I will use “L2 ToL” to refer to ToL in terms of L2 skills. When students succeed in L2 ToL, it means that they are able to manipulate learned L2 skills in out-of-class contexts.

2.2. Language Transfer (LT)

When this concept of transfer is brought into the field of SLA, major confusion may occur because there is already a widely invoked concept containing the word “transfer”, language transfer. This type of transfer refers to, for example, knowledge transfer between a learner’s first language and his target language and transfer of L2 grammatical rules

² Here, readers are encouraged to refrain from inferring a connection with generative grammar.

from one language item to other new but similar items. LT focuses mainly on transfer within language levels. For example, LT includes phonological transfer such as misleading Japanese katakana pronunciations (e.g., "appuru" for apple and "banira" for vanilla), semantic transfer (e.g., from Japanese "naibu" (naïve), which means sensitive in Japanese, to English "naïve" and vice versa), and syntactic transfer resulting in overgeneralization.

As Shirai (2008) points out, there are positive LT and negative LT. For example, L2 learners from Japan may positively use their L1 knowledge of katakana to guess English vocabulary meanings while others who have learned a grammatical rule that verb plus the affix "ed" makes the past tense may negatively transfer the knowledge and say something like "goed," "maked," and "puted." Although this type of transfer is a major research field in SLA, it is not the focus of the present paper.

3. Broader Views on ToL

First, let me mention Saxe (1988) to demonstrate the kinds of problems that exist in relating schoolwork and actual work outside school. In his investigation aimed at clarifying "the interplay between informal and school mathematics learning" (p. 14), he compares mathematical performances of Brazilian children, some of whom have experienced working as candy sellers. Although he demonstrates some interplay between children's school algorithmic knowledge and practical strategies acquired through candy selling, his observation indicates significant advantages of actual experiences. "In dealing with practice-linked problems, unschooled candy sellers develop a mathematical system, one that their nonselling peers do not achieve at the same age, if at all" (Saxe, 1988, p. 19). He also points out that this distinction between sellers and nonsellers gets bigger when tasks get more complex. Questioning the formal mathematics of the classroom, he declares that researchers should figure out how to make a bridge or linkages between school and the outside world.

Resnick (1987) also describes the problem that “the process of schooling seems to encourage the idea that the ‘game of school’ is to learn symbolic rules of various kinds, that there is not supposed to be much continuity between what one knows outside school and what one learns in school” (p. 15). Engeström (1991) calls such an issue of school education “encapsulation of school learning.” He describes this problem using an example of students misunderstanding how the moon changes its shape. According to him, there are three methods to overcome the situation: ascending from the abstract to the concrete, originally developed by V. V. Davydov (cited in Engeström, 1991), Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation, and his own suggestion, learning by expanding.

Davydovian theory puts emphasis on students’ discovery of the core relationship in a context, and as its name suggests, on their transition to more specific phenomena using deduction based on the core. Lave and Wenger (1991) consider the problem of encapsulation from a different viewpoint. They claim that learning is “gradually increasing participation in a ‘community of practice’” (cited in Engeström, 1991, p. 252). According to their suggestion, school should install a community-like structure in classrooms, in which students as peripheral participants observe and learn from models and experience various kinds of tasks. In short, they stress the importance of apprenticeship, a social factor of learning. Engeström, in his theory of expansive learning, points out that students themselves need opportunities to critically examine their learning contents, school materials, and activities. He also highlights the implication of expansive learning that, with combinations of the three alternative solutions, school institutions can involve the local community.

Bereiter (1997) also deals with the problem of discontinuity between school knowledge and actual experience outside school by analyzing situated cognition, part of humans’ biological nature. His main idea of how to overcome situated learning is to collaboratively build knowledge objects. Knowledge objects are “theories (or theorylike conjectures, at any rate), interpretations, historical accounts, problem statements, defenses based on

evidence, and so on" (1997, *Schooling and Knowledge Work*, ¶ 6). Putting emphasis on the importance of implicit knowledge in the learning process, rather than product knowledge, he introduces eight advantageous aspects of collaborative knowledge building. According to him, such an activity can:

1. Improve students' theories and knowledge objects;
2. Help them move along a developmental continuum which spans from unconscious to intentional creation of immaterial knowledge objects;
3. Make them build on or deal with existing knowledge;
4. Avoid inert knowledge because, Bereiter (1997) says, learning of a theoretical and abstract nature is best achieved by creating new knowledge;
5. Be effectively integrated with necessary instruction;
6. Easily and naturally involve professionals outside school;
7. Trigger students' "why" questions and let them gain basic and general knowledge objects which may work broadly to overcome situated cognition;
8. Prepare students for a knowledge-based society by making good use of situated learning in a community of practice.

Including Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bereiter (1997), such social approaches to school learning seem to have been developed based on sociocultural arguments such as Vygotsky's (1978) that learning naturally occurs through social interactions and Brown, Collins, and Duguid's (1989) that learning takes place in a culture. Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of potential development of learners which can only be reached in collaboration with other people with the well-known notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD is explained as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration

with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is clear that social components are necessary to stay within the ZPD.

Similarly, Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) explain that “the activities of a domain are framed by its culture. Their meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members. Activities thus cohere in a way that is, in theory, if not always in practice, accessible to members who move within the social framework” (p. 34). According to them, such activities are authentic because they are based on “the ordinary practice of the culture” (p. 34). Putting particularly strong emphasis on authentic activities and contexts which are enculturated, they propose “cognitive apprenticeship and collaborative learning” (p. 40), which are exactly what Lave and Wenger (1991) and Bereiter (1997) have looked deeper into and further developed.

To consider further what transferable knowledge is and how to produce it, I would like to combine Bereiter (2014), Barab (2006), and Nonaka (1991/2007). Bereiter (2014) introduces Principled Practical Knowledge (PPK) which he defines as “knowledge of how to achieve practical objectives but it is also knowledge that can be communicated symbolically, argued about, combined with other propositions to form larger structures, and so on” (Bereiter, 2014, p. 5). Although a main goal of PPK is to span the gap between theory produced in a laboratory and practical use of it in an out-of-lab context, the attempts of PPK are quite the same as what transferable knowledge aims at within schooling contexts. PPK in school should be not only explicit and tangible enough to mediate students’ thoughts, work, and communication, but also practical and useful enough for students to take out from the classroom. According to Bereiter (2014), such knowledge “comes out of and develops simultaneously with efforts to achieve practical goals” (p. 7). Therefore, as he points out, when he shows eight features of “collaborative knowledge building” (Bereiter, 1997), learning of a theoretical and abstract nature is best achieved by creating new knowledge, and robust knowledge is most effectively formed in actual practice.

This process is described by Barab (2006) with the concept of

Design-Based Research (DBR). "An essential part of advancing theory-in-context is to communicate the theory as well as the contextual particulars through which it is realized in practice – a process that design-based research is particularly effective in illuminating" (p. 156). Barab's (2006) example of an actual DBR carried out by his team demonstrates that DBR involves multiple iterations of refinement, innovation, and evolution of a theory. Because their goal is to create a useful theory to structure a designed community, they also carry out several interviews with the participants in it.

Nonaka (1991/2007), from a different standpoint, explains how to produce robust knowledge within a community. He names some successful companies in the late 20th century and observes how they created valuable knowledge and adapted to the innovative society. The prerequisite condition of such companies to survive in the so-called knowledge-based society, according to Nonaka (1991/2007), is never to stop creating new knowledge. Nonaka (1991/2007) describes what had been going on in such "knowledge-creating companies" as follows. Putting especially strong emphasis on individual "serendipity," the companies give each individual employee enough chance to access necessary information, explore on his own, and express his ideas. This opportunity for each worker to process information causes a "spiral of knowledge" in a company. According to Nonaka (1991/2007), the spiral of knowledge consists of four types of knowledge transformation: tacit to explicit, tacit to tacit, explicit to tacit, and explicit to explicit. A special importance is observed in the interaction between the two different types of knowledge. He calls these two types of knowledge transformation "articulation" and "internalization." These critical steps have much in common with PPK production: "articulation" makes implicit knowledge explicit and tangible enough to mediate workers' thoughts, work, and communication, and "internalization" enables workers to practically use the knowledge by themselves to make more improvement.

As of this point, some principles emerge: Practical knowledge can be produced through social contexts, rigorous knowledge is a result of

a theory having undergone trial and error in practical use, and implicit knowledge plays a very important role in enhancing performance quality, especially when it interacts with explicit knowledge. Now, I would like to shift the focus onto authenticity of learning in the SLA field to explore how language activities and assessments in a classroom can contribute to learners' practical, meaningful, and transferable skills.

4. ToL in SLA

First, I would like to consider assessment types so as to show an important aspect of transfer-oriented assessments as well as to point out some common assessment problems in language classrooms. Bachman (1990) shows two types of assessment: summative and formative. Summative assessments focus on student progress and are often carried out at the end of instructional courses while formative assessments focus on providing feedback to both learners and instructors so that they can improve their learning and teaching based on the results (Bachman, 1990, p. 62).

In reference to Bachman (1990), Poehner (2007) says that summative assessments "determine the extent to which students have learned specific course content" and formative assessments "have a much closer relationship to instruction because their results feed back into classroom teaching" (p. 323). Then, he places Dynamic Assessment in the middle of the two types explaining that "DA does not differentiate instructional activities from assessment activities because every mediator-learner interaction encompasses both types of activities" (p. 324). Referring to sociocultural theory, he also highlights the importance of learners' current levels explaining that DA involves tutors' mediation to the extent that learners can sufficiently respond to increasingly challenging tasks.

The efficacy of dynamic assessment has been examined in much research. One strand of research focuses on DA's role in L2 listening comprehension tasks. Shabani (2014) observes how DA, especially group dynamic assessment (G-DA), improves L2 learners' listening abilities by

analyzing their performances in increasingly innovative tasks after G-DA. Recommending the use of DA in SLA tasks, Shabani (2014) demonstrates the limited effectiveness of non-dynamic assessment (NDA) and implies a classroom problem from an assessment point of view: "NDA procedure stops short of fully capturing the learners' underlying potential and leaves aside the abilities which are in the state of ripening" (p. 1736).

Shabani's (2014) study shows a positive aspect of DA with demonstration of learners' improved listening performances in transcendence tasks, whose research is ostensibly based on Poehner (2007; 2009; 2010, cited in Shabani, 2014). However, Poehner's (2007) original view on DA seems slightly different. Poehner's (2007) observation on two L2 learners who share the same language problem shows that DA can hardly reveal their skill differences. This is because, according to Poehner (2007), "DA is concerned with helping individuals" (p. 337). The central tenet of DA is to offer mediation, which directly affects learners' abilities being assessed (p. 336). Truly assessed skills are only observable in more complex tasks or transcendence tasks. With an example in which two L2 learners' skill difference gradually emerges, Poehner (2007) shows a limitation of DA: that generalizations about learners' abilities "based solely on their DA performance would have overlooked the differences that became apparent only when the learners moved beyond the assessments to more complex tasks" (p. 332). Therefore, the main focus of this research is not whether DA or NDA is better, but how to assess learners' skills beyond DA and the importance of transcendence tasks.

This kind of argument on assessments is important because, in order to promote L2 ToL, it is necessary to know whether students' current knowledge and skills are transferable or not. These skills cannot be revealed by very common assessments such as summative tests and even DA. Now I would like to move on to more practice-specific and activity-focused discussion on L2 ToL.

In 2018, a very useful research timeline was composed by James. He analyzes 51 scholarly works which are more or less related to L2 teaching and L2 ToL. He lists six particularly relevant factors to transfer in SLA

contexts. His review of the literature pinpoints the following features as important principles:

1. Contextual similarity;
2. Learning of general principles;
3. Amount of practice;
4. Variability in practice;
5. Learner affect such as motivation to transfer;
6. Support for transfer in transfer contexts (James, 2018, p. 332).

To examine some of these factors of L2 ToL, I would like to discuss relative concepts, theories, and approaches to L2 ToL.

A very important concept to discuss when we deal with transferability in SLA contexts is automatization. Although there are some slightly different definitions of the word according to different researchers, a basic idea is that “the more automatized knowledge is, the less attention it requires and the less error-prone it is” (DeKeyser & Criado, 2013, p. 2). DeKeyser and Criado (2013) also mention Logan’s (1988, 2002, cited in DeKeyser & Criado, 2013) view that “automaticity, rather than efficient use of a rule, implies retrieval of an instance from memory that is very similar to the one currently being processed” (p. 3). It is, therefore, expected that the more automatized knowledge learners acquire, the easier it would be for them to transfer the knowledge to different occasions. Skill acquisition theory (Johnson, 1996) describes how L2 learners can acquire such knowledge. DeKeyser and Criado (2013) explain that skill acquisition can be seen as some sequential stages in which learners show different levels of skills. They also name three types of knowledge to be acquired through the stages: declarative, procedural, and automatized. Declarative knowledge is “knowledge or information about things and facts,” while procedural knowledge is “related to knowledge about how to perform various processes or behaviors” (DeKeyser & Criado, 2013, p. 1). As a result of these two types of knowledge, automatized knowledge can be attained. Because L2 learners are to acquire these types of knowledge in this order,

and each of the stages should necessarily be taken, DeKeyser (1998, p. 58, cited in DeKeyser & Criado, 2013, p. 3) suggests a set of activities which involve all the knowledge types as follows: “explicit teaching of grammar, followed by FonF [focus on form] activities to develop declarative knowledge, and then gradually less focused communicative exercises to foster proceduralization and automatization.”

Lyster and Sato (2013), on the other hand, show a different insight about skill acquisition theory within SLA contexts. They claim that “the interplay between declarative and procedural knowledge in the context of instructed SLA is best seen as bidirectional and influenced by the instructional setting” (pp. 76-77). According to them, this contention goes along with Lyster and Mori’s (2006, cited in Lyster & Sato, 2013) Counterbalance Hypothesis, which suggests that “interlanguage restructuring can be triggered by instructional interventions that orient learners in the direction opposite to that [to] which their target language learning environment has accustomed them” (p. 77). Lyster and Sato (2013) give an example of traditional language classrooms whose focus is often solely on declarative knowledge, and the necessity of instruction which adopts Bruner’s (1997, cited in Lyster & Sato, 2013) scaffolding to improve students’ procedural knowledge. On the other hand, pointing out that learners in more communicative classrooms may fail to acquire basic declarative knowledge of the target language while successfully acquiring procedural knowledge, they also show the necessity of more form-focused instruction in such contexts. Lyster and Sato (2013) show an example of instruction using formulaic expressions acquired by students in communicative instructions as follows: “In classroom settings where L2 learners rely on the use of formulaic language in their early production ... teachers are encouraged to engage students, increasingly over time, in analyses of formulaic items as a means of developing a more generative rule-based system” (p. 78).

The repetitively emphasized importance of appropriate practice in classrooms by SLA researchers leads us to another ToL-related concept, transfer-appropriate processing (TAP), which was originally developed

in the field of cognitive psychology. Lightbown (2007, p. 27, in reference to Blaxton, 1989; Morris et al., 1977), explains: “the fundamental tenet of TAP is that we can better remember what we have learned if the cognitive processes that are active during learning are similar to those that are active during retrieval.” This tenet has led to the popularization of communicative instruction under the premise that communicative abilities should be learned in actual use and interaction. According to Lightbown (2007), research on TAP has strong connections with the levels of processing (LOP) approach to ToL research which sometimes prioritizes a certain linguistic feature owing to it being more transferable. For example, research with the LOP approach may suggest that learners learn vocabulary better when they focus on semantic rather than formal aspects of words. However, Lightbown (2007, in reference to Morris et al., 1977) concludes that “the most successful retrieval was achieved when the retrieval conditions were similar to the learning conditions” (p. 31). Some smaller components of the learning contexts to trigger ToL are also listed as: frequency, distribution and spacing, generation, and elaboration (Lightbown, 2007). Lightbown (2007) explains, “communicative language teaching is implicitly based on this idea” (p. 33). However, as I discussed above in reference to Lyster and Sato (2013), Lightbown (2007) also shows the limitation of excessively open-ended communicative language teaching. Instead, she introduces form-meaning mapping practice, developed, for example, in Trofimovich and Gatlinton (2006), in which learners practice expressions necessary to complete classroom tasks through gradual move from explicitly form-focused opportunities to more open-ended interactions. Lightbown (2007) also emphasizes the importance of natural feedback in communicative contexts, which effectively helps learners express what they want to. Finally, introducing Bjork’s (1994) study on memory, Lightbown (2007) argues that some difficulties should be set up in language learning because it is expected that language experience outside classrooms may be more complex and communicatively challenging. According to her, Bjork’s (1994) difficulties include varying the condition of practice, creating contextual interference during learning, distributing or spacing study

and practice, reducing feedback to the learner, and using tests as learning events (Lightbown, 2007, p. 39).

Some of these difficulties appear to contradict the ToL principles listed by James (2018). Especially, the reduction of feedback may cause the most controversy. Lightbown (2007, p. 41) explains: "if there is constant external feedback, learners may cease to notice it in the teacher's language," which may result in little need for learners to self-monitor and effortfully generate knowledge by themselves. As well as feedback, teachers are expected to use tests properly. The tests recommended here are presumably what I have discussed above as formative assessments. Lightbown contends that "in a classroom, tests as learning events may have the added benefit of providing diagnostic information about what students have learned and what they still need help with" (p. 42). As Poehner (2007) suggests, difficulties are necessary as well as transcendence tasks to reveal learners' actual levels and examine if their skills are mature enough to successfully get along outside classrooms. Therefore, including all the desirable difficulties, teachers are expected to effectively provide students with appropriate tasks, tests, and feedback which can help their practical knowledge and skills improve.

5. Discussion

As shown in section 3, many researchers are concerned with inherent attributes of human learning. Humans learn most things during their lives by means of others' help, especially through social interactions. Otherwise, they have to learn by actual experience. In my opinion, the research introduced in section 3 considers transfer-oriented learning from these two perspectives of human learning. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991), Bereiter (1997), and Brown, Collins, and Duguid's (1989) research clearly take a sociocultural perspective, while Saxe (1988), Engeström (1991), Davydov (cited in Engeström, 1991), Bereiter (2014), Barab (2006), and partially Nonaka (1991/2007) focus more on spontaneous consolidation of individual transferable knowledge.

While section 3 suggests a comparatively broad agreement among researchers and educators that school has to be an authentically social place where learners communicate and share their ideas, problems, and knowledge interactively while looking for and producing new knowledge, the SLA research described in section 4 concerning what kind of language practice works best to transfer learners' language skills appears not to have reached a consensus. This may be because most ToL research in the SLA field focuses too broadly on L2 skills as transfer targets or simply due to the difficulties of adapting theories from different fields to support claims in the SLA field. For example, including Lightbown (2008) and DeKeyser and Criado (2013), most studies dealing with L2 ToL derive their views from psychological studies.

It is worth considering, however, that a certain number of explicit L2 ToL principles are listed by some researchers (e.g., James, 2018; Lightbown, 2007), and it appears to be a robust finding that ToL is triggered when there is cognitive and contextual similarity between learning and retrieving, which is surely supported everywhere regardless of specialized areas and subjects. This may lead to some skill-specific instruction such as grammatical drills for test preparations, repeated practice for automatization, and communicative language teaching for improving communicative competence and L2 fluency.

Concerning the MEXT's goal of English education in Japanese high schools stipulated in the course of study, which I introduced in the first section, the most suitable instruction type seems to be communicative language teaching (or its various offshoots) for the following reasons. First, "skills of putting the knowledge to practical use in actual communication" (translated from MEXT, p. 163) can only be acquired through practical use in actual communication or, at least, authentic activities. These kinds of opportunities are absolutely the main purpose of communicative language teaching. Second, students are exposed to extensive input in communicative contexts, while they have ample opportunities for output according to their developing proficiency levels. Third, students do not have to drill all the time, which makes them more motivated.

However, as discussed through section 4, communicative language teaching alone, at least in its strong form, can never achieve the MEXT's goal, especially the part expressed as "to deepen students' understanding of foreign language sound, vocabulary, expression, grammar, and how language works" (translated from MEXT, p. 163). Language skills should be properly acquired through developing all the three types of knowledge (i.e., declarative, procedural, and automatized knowledge) as DeKeyser and Criado (2013) and Lyster and Sato (2013) discussed. In other words, considering Lightbown's (2007) argument in section 4, meaning-focused activities should necessarily integrate form-focused instruction to improve students' procedural and declarative knowledge as well as for automatization.

Thus, we can say that students' skills of L2 ToL, paying special attention to goals described in the course of study, should be trained in communicative language teaching with necessary tasks, assessments, and instruction to reinforce the basic knowledge.

6. Conclusion

This paper has discussed ToL from both general and SLA-specific perspectives. Compared to the former, SLA researchers seem to be struggling to find a consensus in terms of what works best. The existing studies provide their own views on what can enhance L2 ToL, which may cause a little confusion, especially when thinking of specific language activities in an L2 classroom. This may be because the contexts of learning such as background settings, learning purposes, and available materials can vary depending on each classroom. Thinking of English education in Japanese high schools, the similarity principle pushes communicative learning while DeKeyser and Criado's (2013) discussion reasonably supports the importance of basic language knowledge underlying such communicative performance. How and to what extent instructors should integrate meaning-focus and form-focused activities can be further pursued and developed in future research.

Another possible issue is to what extent instructors should focus on contextualization. Some researchers, based on the similarity principle, may prioritize contextual richness as much as possible, while others may cast doubt on it by saying that contextualized tasks are bound to certain situations (e.g., Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). Actually, this is partially why Lightbown (2007) demonstrates the importance of desirable difficulty. More questions remain to be answered such as what enhances transfer of communicative competence and specific L2 skills such as speaking skills and writing skills. Considering the recent shift in emphasis towards output activities, the latter question is of urgent interest.

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