

【研修報告】

An International Conference Report on The Fourth CLS International Conference (CLaSIC 2010) Singapore 2nd - 4th December 2010 Individual Characteristics and Subjective Variables in Language Learning

Simon Capper*

The conference theme, "Individual Characteristics and Subjective Variables in Language Learning," recognized the subjective and affective aspects that each learner and each teacher brings to the language learning process. CLaSIC 2010 (Centre for Language Studies 4th International Conference) took place over a period of three days from December 2nd-4th in the Singapore Orchard Hotel, and was organized by the National University of Singapore's Centre for Language Studies. The conference also welcomed The Asia-Pacific Symposium for the Teaching of Asian Languages (APSTAL), in an effort to promote collaboration between teachers and researchers of Asian-Pacific languages. Presentations reported on current pedagogical approaches, views and concepts, providing a forum for discussion and critical appraisal of classroom practices. The ten conference sub-themes were:

1. Metacognition and Language Learning Strategies.
2. Language Learning Motivation and Motivational Strategies
3. Learner Characteristics and Individual Differences.
4. Cognitive Factors in Language Teaching and Learning.
5. Language Learning Anxiety and Fear.
6. Constructivist Approaches to Language Learning.
7. Affect in Language Teaching and Learning.
8. Narrative and Life Story.
9. Teacher/Learner Beliefs, Attitudes and Assumptions.
10. Cultural and Individual Notions of Autonomy.

Of the 18 presentations attended, the following were of particular interest, as they either confirmed the efficacy of classroom-based methodologies currently undertaken in the Japanese Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing (JRCHCN) International Disaster Relief Nursing (IDRN) courses, or because they stimulated new ideas for future adoption and improvement.

Keynote speaker Dr. Elaine Tarone of the University of Minnesota advocated teachers facilitating unrehearsed oral learner language in the classroom. Professor Tarone suggested that teachers can hone their pedagogical approach as a result of observing learners engaging in unscripted, less formally structured language interactions, thus enabling improvements in complexity, grammaticality and fluency. Allowing learners to freely interact will also, of course, benefit their communicative (discourse, strategic, sociolinguistic, grammatical) competence, while appropriately designed tasks will enable profitable reflection.

Professor Anna Uhl Chamot of The George Washington University, USA, talked about learning strategies and differentiated learning. Her proposals included encouraging teachers to use interviews, discussions and questionnaires in order to develop awareness of the strategies used by individual learners in the class. The results, she argues, will leave teachers more able to offer differentiated learning instruction, more appropriate to learners' individual needs. Given the range of abilities in the JRCHCN IDRN course, this talk

* Japanese Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing

was of particular interest.

Simon Cooke of Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, gave an informative presentation outlining the benefits of teaching communicative strategies in the classroom, and the adoption of reflective learning practices among students. Although Cooke suggests that his learners may have benefited from (or been influenced by) the Hawthorne Effect, his proposals (to encourage students to take notice of their output) showed considerable promise.

One of the conference themes was 'narrative and life story'. Two presentations stood out, not least for the possibilities that they engendered for self-reflection and, more practically, for writing activities. Professor Naoko Aoki of the Graduate School of Letters, Osaka University, referred to the 'storied' nature of professional knowledge and how this might enhance teacher development. Just as learners use schematic knowledge to make sense of the world, so teachers devise their approaches and strategies based on an accumulated memory of 'stories' that they have experienced, in classes, with students, and with other teachers. Acknowledging that not all stories will be useful, Dr. Aoki demonstrated how certain ones might be more beneficial than others in aiding teacher development. Her insightful aphorism, that "When you're good at talking, you have an audience; when you're good at listening, you have friends" was, in itself, worth the time spent in this presentation.

Another interesting talk related to narrative was made by Professor Barry Natusch of Nihon University. His 'Stories of Good Language Learners' posited that with the huge amounts of data that learners have to deal with, the potential to motivate and effectively teach is more likely to be effected through the use of narrative than by providing yet more facts and abstract theories. To this end, rather than creating lists of successful learner strategies, learners should rather be exposed to the narratives of other successful

learners. Comparing the results of two student groups, one group receiving strategy training, the other being exposed to the narratives of successful learners, Natusch's pilot study, although statistically inconclusive on the comparative uptake of strategies, did indicate that the narrative approach was more popular. This finding raises questions regarding materials design and encourages further research, particularly in the field of motivation and methodology.

There were many other notable talks, too numerous to detail here, however special mentions should go to some fascinating work by:

- Jo Mynard of Kanda University of International Studies, Chiba, for 'Promoting Cognitive and Metacognitive Awareness through Self-Study Modules: An Investigation into Advisor Comments'. This presentation raised some important points about the nature of our IDRN course's Portfolio management and the need for the portfolio to reflect the process of learning.
- Phil Benson of the Hong Kong Institute of Education for 'Individual difference and context in study abroad'.
- Keynote speaker Karin Aguado of the University of Kassel, Germany, who addressed issues related to language aptitude and L2 learning, and
- Keynote speaker Zhou Minglang of the University of Maryland, USA, who examined questions related to learners' linguistic identity and the process of language learning.

To limit this report to so few speakers perhaps does a disservice to many other excellent presenters, however their omission should not detract from the fact that CLaSIC 2010 was a highly worthwhile and commendable conference. I would like to thank Japanese Red Cross Hiroshima College of Nursing for their generous support, without which my attendance at the conference would not have been possible.