

Outsourcing In 2nd FL Learning In Japan

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Outsourcing, and especially the use of new media, is seen as one way to cope with the limitations of the 2nd foreign language (2FL) teaching situation and provide a rich learning environment for 2FL learning in Japan. This paper briefly looks at the “origin” of outsourcing. This is followed by reasoning for the importance of this concept, especially for 2FL learning in Japan and the introduction of the wider idea of a “rich multimodal learning environment.” Future vistas consider possible problem areas, including the requirement of speed in utterance exchanges, and also a boost in speaking.

アウトソーシング，特にニューメディアの利用は，行き詰まった第2外国語教授法にうまく対応しており，日本における第2外国語学習に恵まれた環境を提供しているのではないだろうか。この論文では，アウトソーシングの原点を簡単に述べ（1）、それは特に日本における第2外国語学習にとって重要であることを指摘し（2）、このコンセプトに関連するマルチモダル学習環境の幅広いアイデアを紹介する（3）。将来の展望は，外国語コミュニケーションに必要な対話交換の速度という問題をはらみつつも（4）、スピーキング能力の飛躍的上達を含んでいるだろう（5）。

The concept of outsourcing

The concept of outsourcing stems from the following management approach:

“Outsourcing is an arrangement in which one company provides services for another company that could also be or usually have been provided in-house. Outsourcing is a trend that is becoming more common in information technology and other industries for services that have usually been regarded as intrinsic to managing a business. In some cases, the entire information management of a company is outsourced, including planning and business analysis as well as the installation, management, and servicing of the network and workstations. Outsourcing can range from the large contract in which a company like IBM manages IT services for a company like Xerox to the practice of hiring contractors and temporary office workers on an individual basis.” <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0,289893,sid9-gci212731.00.html>

Or somewhat simpler: “Outsourcing assumes that if an institution cannot provide a service or product at less cost than, and of equal quality to, an external provider, then it should purchase the service or product from an external provider. Advocates of outsourcing argue that the private sector provides service more efficiently and at lower cost than the public sector, which is unmotivated

by profit” (Jefferies, 1996 as cited in <http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC-Digests/ed446726.html>). Outsourcing has been applied in many areas, as well as in various educational contexts, especially where these are linked to profit areas; e.g. “Outsourcing has traditionally been used to operate campus bookstores and dining services. It has more recently become a legitimate option for additional campus functions, including facilities operation, computer services, security, child care, residence halls, teaching hospitals, remedial classes, and even entire institutions” (Goldstein, Kempner, Rush and Bookman, 1993; Gilmer, 1997 <http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC-Digests/ed446726.html>).

Transferring Outsourcing to (Foreign) Language Teaching

Apart from software development for foreign language courses, when we speak of outsourcing in FL learning courses, we usually refer to things that could be done in the classroom but can also, or perhaps should, be done outside of this context. This means that activities such as writing a story in a FL are usually done before (as try or preparation) or after (as repetition) the actual teaching, and thus not simultaneously. Outsourcing takes on a time dimension. We can then rewrite the definition given above for language learning contexts as follows: “Outsourcing has more recently become a legitimate option for additional learning opportunities, including

vocabulary practice, computer assisted learning, repetition etc. and even entire accompanying seminars.” In the end, a re-location metaphor has partly been changed into a time metaphor. This is only just, since time is what is lacking most in 2FL courses in Japan (Hoshino, 2001).

Although rudimentary forms of outsourcing have always been used, such as homework, the situation has changed dramatically within the last decade in Japan. After the loss of the foreign language requirement for university graduation, many second foreign language courses were reduced from two year to one year or even one term courses. This means that certain parts of a foreign language simply cannot be practiced as required for any minimal acquisition, such as gradual learning of communication components, re-learning of the pronunciation and writing mapping after the loss of the pronunciation-writing link when learning English, vocabulary, and even grammatical exercises have suffered considerably, let alone the listening, reading, contents and cultural information parts. All these problems become especially important in the case of 2nd FLs, since these are not everywhere around in the environment of the learners, as is English, the FL1. Thus, despite all monetary funding and teaching, 2FL learning often takes place in “poor learning environments”. Then, additional learning efforts are necessary, which, however, students in ever decreasing

numbers are willing to make.

If individual parts of the classroom teaching can be transferred outside of it and learning can continue there, this could have supportive effects. Such outsourcing, used systematically and on a wide scale, could also have motivating effects. This was already the case when I had the same class on either end of the week, so that I could give homework to be submitted between lessons. With fast advancing, technical improvements, the spread of new media, and not the least the ubiquitous Internet, teachers may even be able to make up at least for some of the disadvantageous developments.

If learners then become motivated to learn on their own, we may be able to speak of autonomous learners (van Lier 1996). The assumption that this learner autonomy is the case, sometimes even to a very high degree, has been underlying in most recent discussions of teaching methods, although I have sincere doubts that this is even wanted by the majority of learners.

Outsourcing and the multimodal-learning environment

A first model for a wider foreign language acquisition environment is presented by Rueschoff (2000): He introduces the six parts of a rich learning environment (eine reiche Lernumgebung) as multi-modal integrated learning environment (eine integrierte multimodale Lernwelt) in terms of a room (or area) metaphor

(Rueschoff & Ritter, 2001, p. 229-230).



According to this model, e.g. the teacher is seen as tutor in the classroom area (Unterrichtsraum). Practical activities, such as reading training are performed in the training area (Trainingsraum). Metacognitive discovery procedures are used when learning as observatory (area) (Observatorium). Communicative tasks such as preparing communication in the classroom and the exchange of e-mails take place in the communication area (Kommunikationsraum). Process- or result-oriented project work, such as the production of a page and its

publication take place in the project area (Projektraum). In the gallery (Atelier), for example texts are constructed, written and edited.

Outsourcing in this model can be done in various ways, only one of which is the Internet. There, according to Iwasaki (2001), at least the following kind of activities can be performed as autonomous learning, e.g.:

1. Grammar and vocabulary, reading and listening practice (training area)
2. Dialogue practice (training area)
3. Partner practice in the strictly controlled phase (training area)
4. Repetition and setting of contents learnt in class (classroom area)
5. Unstructured practice (communication area)

Concrete examples of what can be done are slowly being realized, such as in the Hiroshima on-line German course project (Iwasaki & Yoshida 2001). It has also become clear that certain areas profit extensively from the availability of the internet, such as cultural information (Halm-Karadeniz 2001, Yoshida 2001), although considerable work is necessary to prepare the material for use—as well as the students for using original materials.

The future: vistas, tasks and problems

Questions for the future

If at least the ever faster developing multimedia are supposed to fulfill their role as one outsourcing possibility, a number of questions still have to be answered, such as:

“Exactly what is the influence of the following aspects on success in learning:

- multimedia/ new media (in comparison to traditional media);
- the access to media (online/offline);
- one certain medium vs. a certain combination of media such as e.g. audio only vs. video and audio together;
- the way a task is given (controlled (tutored) vs. open learning/ practice units; instruction vs. ‘construction’);
- media competence and other capabilities (experience with computers, contents, learning strategies and with partners);

How can the new technologies be integrated with the remaining pedagogical structures?”

And finally, “How can/ will (foreign language) learning in institutional contexts be changed by the integration of new technologies?” (Hassert, 2000, p. 69).

Problem factors

This uncertain outlook is dimmed by a number

of factors involved, but usually not given due consideration:

- autonomy: Outsourcing heavily relies on learner autonomy. That this can be presupposed to be the case can rightfully be doubted. Rather than deciding or working on their own, students wanted a well- informed but strong guidance through their language learning (Reinelt, 2000);
- additional efforts: Outsourcing simply means more work for the learner, i.e. class time only will not be enough. Such additional foreign language contact is certainly welcome by a large number of already motivated students or those being motivated easily. However, those who are not so motivated might not do the additional work, and thus an even wider gap to those who are motivated or just better may open up;
- using outsourcing for reducing teacher positions as administrative measure.

Outsourcing in the sense used here is fundamentally different from that in management where it is used to reduce costs in the first instance. In language learning, it has to be an additional but integrated component (see links of the outlying parts in the model in 3). This means that, different than in management, where the original part in one’s own company that was replaced by outsourcing can be released, in the case of foreign

language learning, the original classroom teaching including the teacher has to continue. Thus, outsourcing is no way to reduce positions at a language learning institution—especially not in the case of 2FL in Japan, where the learning environment constantly dangles on the verge of perishing—but an additional chance for learners.

A necessary addition

A striking example is the speed of 2FL conversation and utterance exchanges. Its practice has to become variable on tapes and other such materials, since FL learning is, if taken earnestly, learning to manage a foreign language (heard or to be pronounced, or even read or written) in a time span that is acceptable to those involved. While there may be considerable differences in the duration allowed to pass until a communication break-up looms, from less than 5 seconds in German classrooms to up to 1 or two minutes in Japanese classrooms (Reinelt, 1992), this is still a highly demanding reaction time for any FL learner to produce an appropriate contribution. Thus we would need, foremost I would like to say, outsourcing which takes due care of training the speaking and comprehension speed in contact situations with native speakers; i.e. listening practice with increasing speed, listening and voice recognition programs etc.

A boost to speaking

If outsourcing really works in teaching and thus contributes considerably to (second foreign) language learning, e.g. having as much as possible or even more 2FL learning taking place in a structured way outside of the classroom, this can have a tremendous effect on the one most important ability, which is usually also the most difficult to learn: speaking. Outsourcing can set free class time for the practice of conversation from anything that starts after pronunciation learning. If only part of this would be fulfilled, 2FL learning could turn out, even if only for the very short time that it does take place, and given the circumstances of English teaching as they still prevail in Japan, to be much more successful than 1FL English. But this will be the end of the term.

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