The 24-Hour English-Only Challenge: Creating an English Environment Outside the Classroom

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A common refrain among Japanese EFL students is they cannot practice speaking English outside English classrooms because their ordinary surroundings are not conducive to English use. This paper details the "24-Hour English-Only Challenge," an extracurricular activity through which students can operate in an English-Only environment where the target language is practiced extensively. The challenge is designed to enable students to expand their English-Only bubble outside the classroom and into their everyday Japanese lives. Although the 24-Hour English-Only Challenge can be implemented in a number of different learning institutions, our research focuses on English programs associated with university campuses. Results from a 24-Hour English-Only Challenge conducted by teachers at Kansai University of International Studies will be given. The intense nature of the 24-Hour English-Only Challenge can help foster learner-autonomy and promote cross-cultural communication all while challenging previous apprehensions about how harmoniously English can be integrated into their everyday lives.

　日本のEFL学生の英語習得を阻む要因として、英語の使用が促進される生活環境ではなく、英語クラス以外で英会話を実践できないという点が挙げられる。学生が英会話を実践する環境を見つけるのが困難であるのに加えて、教師が教室外の英会話の実践に影響を及ぼすことが困難でもある。本論文では、学生が英語のみの環境で対象の言語を集中的に実践できる課外教育プログラム「24時間チャレンジ（24-Hour　Challenge）」について説明する。このプログラムは、学生が英語のみの会話を教室や日常生活に広げていくことを促進し、可能にするためのものである。この24時間チャレンジは多くの教育機関で実施することができるが、本研究では大学キャンパスの英語プログラムに焦点を当てており、関西国際大学において最近実施した

24時間チャレンジの結果について報告する。24時間チャレンジの集中性により、学習者の自主性、異文化間コミュニケーションが促進され、学生をよりよい地球市民にする一方で、いかに調和的に学生の日常生活に英語を溶け込ませることができるかについて、従来の考えに対して異議を唱える。

L EARNING **English** in an EFL situation can be a daunting task. Many EFL teachers in Japan have heard: "I've been studying English for over 10 years and I still can't …" or "I can't afford to go abroad, where can I practice my English?" These are openings to conversations that are difficult to find answers for. Even for English majors at universities in Japan, actual speaking class time is limited, so students must augment their class time with out of class study. Materials to practice receptive skills such as reading and listening are readily available for those who are motivated. Writing can be done alone, although it benefits from an audience. Speaking in natural contexts is a highly desirable skill yet is the most elusive. At school in a good English program, there are opportunities to practice speaking with the teachers and other students, but rarely enough to make progress to satisfy students' ultimate goals. Out of class practice is beneficial to progress, but many students in Japan may lack access to sufficient (or any) environments where they can consistently practice English oral communication. Here lies the conundrum.

It is difficult to escape "Japanese-ness" in Japan. Japan is generally lacking a significant English speaking community of immigrants. As can be expected, almost all communication between Japanese people is exclusively done in Japanese; a lone Japanese person trying to speak English only to improve their skills will not get far. Although there can be some social and economic rewards for being proficient in English in the business world, extrinsic factors supporting an English only lifestyle for a Japanese student are few and far between.

The solution is to create and sustain an English speaking community in Japan. This project took the start of such a university community and pushed it out into the wider, city community for one day to show students what could be achieved, using English only, while still in Japan. The answer by necessity could lie within students' daily lives in Japan. Some of the initial inspiration for this project came from the web site and blog *All Japanese All the Time* whose young American author learned Japanese in less than two years while living and working in America (Khatzumoto, 2006). The author created a Japanese "bubble" in his life where he did as much as possible in Japanese: listened to J-pop exclusively on his iPod, watched only Japanese TV and movies, changed his browser's language and used the Internet in Japanese only, threw out all his English books and replaced them with Japanese comics, etc. Although these specific actions could be useful for EFL students, the underlying idea is more interesting: create an English "bubble" in Japan.

The English Education department at Kansai University of International Studies has a strong learning community with an English only policy that served as a base for this project and created this bubble within the university. The English program requires students to sign a contract their freshman year to speak English only within the classroom hallways, in the cafeteria – any time they are on campus. All courses are taught in English, and after the first semester, all freshmen attend an intensive English study abroad program in Thailand where they must use English to communicate. The program also features a mentor program with the older students fostering the freshmen, in English, through their first year. The goal of this challenge was aimed to create, and show students from all level proficiencies that they can create, a similar "English bubble" in their own lives in the Japanese community. The students were to work together completely in English to complete tasks and achieve non-language learning goals. The tasks within the challenge should be fun with the ultimate goal of speaking English the whole day. The tasks should also show students resources in the area that can be used to improve their English. The researchers

had three questions about the project:

1. Can we create an environment outside of the university where students have to speak English?
2. Will this be appealing to students?
3. Will "non-fluent" students be able to participate with "fluent" students?

In question one we wanted to know if the students could stay in English the whole day and not resort to speaking Japanese when faced with difficulties. In question two we wanted to know if the students would enjoy the event, and if so, would they consider creating similar events in the future on their own? In question three some students were in their third year and had just returned from a year studying abroad and we termed them "fluent," while other students were at the end of only their first semester of university and we termed them "non-fluent". Would these two groups be able to enjoy and learn from the project and interact in a mutually satisfying way?

Literature Review

Planning and implementing this activity was admittedly more a function of creativity and originality than of research of similar activities and subsequent adaptation. Extant literature on broad-ranging scavenger hunts in EFL contexts is quite scant, but there are a few notable sources worthy of mention. Schwartz (1997) details a campus-wide scavenger hunt designed to get new students situated in their Chinese university. Student teams have to cooperate in order to reach a specific goal (answer questions, solve a riddle). Schwarz describes that such an activity has a "memorable impact" on the students.

The desire to push student English-usage outside of the classroom is a fairly common research theme. Norris-Holt (2004) explains a few activities designed to get students to explore their campus, writing translations of Japanese signs and cafete-

ria menus. Porcaro (2011) discusses efforts made in his class to stimulate student interaction with foreign exchange students at his university. Porcaro's study is similar to this research in the sense that it prompts students to consider the benefits of immersion when learning another language while simultaneously initiating conversations in English with foreign people.

Perhaps most relevant to the English-only challenge is Stillwell's (2010) explanation of various ways EFL instructors can design semi-educational excursions to Tokyo Disney. Stillwell maintains that properly arranged trips to Tokyo Disney can enhance student motivation, noticing, media literacy, creativity, and exposure to authentic material. Furthermore, he details how the Tokyo Disney excursion can also include a scavenger hunt with activities promoting awareness, critical thinking, class bonding, and simultaneous translation. For his excursion, Stillwell has students make groups of two to three students, with each student having a specific role in the day's activities (such as time-keeper or answer-writer.) Unlike this research activity, however, Stillwell has his participants set their own level of English-only usage, potentially limiting any kind of small group English-only immersive effect.

Implementation

After much discussion and deliberation, the researchers decided the English-Only Challenge would take the form of a scavenger hunt in which students had to follow clues and perform various tasks. There are multiple reasons for choosing a scavenger hunt challenge. First, students generally did not seem aware of English-friendly places in the Kansai area, so arranging scavenger hunts in such areas was an ideal way to heighten student awareness. Second, a scavenger hunt is an engrossing activity for teams, requiring conversation mixed with critical thinking, which is fostered by solving clues and puzzling out riddles. Third, a scavenger hunt activity would build and strengthen

bonds between students, particularly across years and skill proficiencies. Finally, by completing a public scavenger hunt activity, students learn that they can create an English-Only environment in Japan, even in public settings filled with other Japanese people speaking Japanese.

To create the scavenger hunt, the researchers combined the aforementioned rationale with a central guiding philosophy: student-autonomy. Littlewood (1999) defines autonomy as "students should take responsibility for their own learning" and "taking ownership of many processes which have tradition-ally belonged to the teacher" (p. 71). Ideally, teachers would not have needed to create this activity at all—a motivated and creative group of English students could have designed and implemented this activity on their own. However, students may be reluctant to create and engage in an entirely new activity without some type of model or parameters, so the researchers decided that the English-Only Challenge would be designed to maximize student autonomy by minimizing teacher presence. In effect, this meant that the designers of the activity would be largely absent throughout, leaving the students to perform the tasks on their own.

By combining the philosophy of student-autonomy with the nature of a public scavenger hunt, a compelling riddle arose: *how do the project designers keep students accountable for speaking only English if the project designers are not around to monitor and enforce the English-only rule?* To respond to this conundrum, the researchers implemented two features. At the beginning of the day, students were asked to formally swear an oath, administered by the most senior student participating, to speak only English for the entirety of the day. At the end of the day, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire detailing their commitment to the English-only rule.

In addition to these two features designed to maximize adher-ence to the English-only policy, the researchers also decided to make the activity an "invitational" event. Ideally, all students interested in improving their English would have been invited, but many students at the university lacked the self-control or the willingness necessary to keep the event English-only. Since the researchers had, between the three of them, taught all the students in the English department, they were able to place students in multiple tiers, ranking potential participants in accordance to students' demonstrated commitment to English-only classroom policy. The researchers did have reservations about the exclusive nature of this approach, but since the project was financed entirely by the researchers, not all students could have been invited. In all, 15 students were invited, 12 initially indicated they would participate, three later cancelled, and nine completed the challenge. The nature of the invitation was quite secretive, and details of the challenge's activities were kept from the students.

The challenge itself was designed with a fairly large scope. On the morning of the challenge—a Saturday toward the end of summer vacation—students met in JR Amagasaki station. The oldest participant (a 4th year student) was asked to bring a small laptop and arrive 10 minutes early. The morning of the challenge, this student was given a small USB memory card, a number of small envelopes sealed in a large envelope, and instructions to wait for all the other participants to arrive before opening the envelope or accessing the USB card. The researcher who gave these materials then promptly departed. After all students arrived, the oldest participant opened the largest envelope, revealing that the nine students were to be divided into three teams, with one upperclassman in each team. Then all students watched a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation that was saved on the USB. This presentation had instructions for the day, the text of the English-Only Oath, as well as a video of the researchers themselves swearing the oath. Students then pub-licly swore the oath in the train station. After the oath, students divided into their teams, each received an envelope containing

train tickets, 500 yen for lunch, and a clue. The teams separated and traveled to their different first location.

The locations were three areas between the cities of Osaka and Kobe: the Umeda district in Osaka, Rokko Island south of Kobe, and the Sannomiya district in Kobe. One researcher was set in each area, and each researcher had three responsibilities: design the scavenger hunt for that area (completed prior to the challenge), answer questions students have (via mobile phone), and, when the participants have completed that area's scavenger hunt, give them another envelope containing more train tickets as well as the clue to the next destination. The three teams were always in a different location at a different time, and they did not encounter each other until the end of the day. All clues and tickets and envelopes were sorted out the evening before the event by the researchers.

Locations were thoughtfully chosen for convenient activities, interesting sights, and English-speaking opportunities. The Umeda location featured a coffee shop with a foreign stranger, a researcher's friend but completely unknown to students. This stranger had the next clue in the scavenger hunt. The Umeda location also featured a phone call clue to the researcher in addition to various other planted clues and riddles. The Rokko Island location featured a visit to a grocery store run by an English speaking foreigner, as well as a great deal of map use and riddles. The Sannomiya location, rather than being clue driven, was more free-flowing with a general time limit, and various points awarded for challenging photographs and videos taken.

Throughout the day, students had various photo safari tasks to do at all locations as well as during train rides between locations. Students were awarded points for taking photos of random things (dogs wearing sweaters, for example), points for taking photos of shirts featuring English, as well as photos demonstrating interactions of students speaking with foreigners who were part of the project as well as uninvolved foreigners students approached to ask for a photo. At the end of each team's third location, directions were given to a local restaurant owned and operated by English-speakers. All groups as well as the researchers rendezvoused at the restaurant, and for the first time since the morning, all participants met each other and shared their experiences with the challenge. Also at the restaurant, students were asked to complete the questionnaire.

Discussion and Results

Students responded to the English-Only challenge through various methods. The students took photographs, videos, and finally, answered an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix A) at the end of the day. The questionnaire consisted of nine questions: 8 were short answer and one was short answer plus multiple-choice.

The first question asked students to report how many times during the day they had spoken Japanese, and if they had, what words or expressions they used and why. Three students reported they spoke English only. Though it was anonymous, it seems likely that the three students who spoke only English were the upperclassmen who all returned from studying abroad. Of the other students, all six reported speaking Japanese one to five times in the course of the day. However, they reported that the Japanese used was not complete sentences, but rather automatic responses and spontaneous expressions. For example, students reported saying words like, "*hai*!," (yes) "*oishii*," (delicious) and "*sugoi*" (wow). Students mentioned during face-to-face conversation at the end of the 24 Hour Challenge that these words "just popped out"; these responses were automatic.

The second question (What was the most difficult task?) and the eighth question (What was more difficult—talking in English to strangers or talking in English to your teammates?) could have been more clearly defined because the responses to these

questions overlap. Students said that due to the English Only policy at the university, speaking in English to their teammates was "not difficult". None of the students said this was a challenge. The students did report that speaking to and asking questions of strangers in English was difficult. However, they did not report whether it was more difficult to approach Japanese or foreign strangers. A few students also stated that "speaking English all day" was difficult. The lesser fluent students typically speak English for four or five hours a day at the university; thus, the jump to a twelve-hour day was a significant trial of their abilities. In the student made videos, the students most often talking are the more language proficient students, with the less language proficient students often simply smiling or waving at the camera or saying an easy expression.

Question three asked students which task was the most fun or interesting. The students varied in their responses, each student liking something slightly different. One student said, "The most interesting was always speaking English." A majority of the students implied that solving clues was the best part of the task. Example answers include: "The most interesting task […] when we found a paper in the middle of [sic] Harry Potter book" and "Clue under the bridge (in Rokko)" as well as "when we found the answer to reach some places" and " Clue 4, we effort find out purpose place [sic]".

Question four asked the students to report on the biggest challenge to speaking English only. One student did not answer, and another said it was "not big challenge for me." However, all seven other students reported that speaking English all day or speaking English to Japanese people was the biggest challenge. One student said, "to speak English to Japanese people (not info center people) … they understand we are Japanese!"

The fifth question asked the students about what new vocabulary they learned. For the less language proficient students, the exposure to vocabulary was significant, but a few words

that were significantly difficult but mentioned in the clues were retained by the end of the day. The students' recall of the words for the survey at the end of the evening showed the students noticed and began to commit these words to memory even though they were non-high frequency words. Students reported the following words:

Table 1. Vocabulary Words Reported by Students

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
rub	3	boar	2
mascue [sic] mask	1	stable	2
pillar	2	swaying	2
immediately	1	lilacs	1
unaware	1	devastatingly	1

All of these words were used in clues during the day. Students may have used their cell phone dictionaries in order to get a definition, a synonym, or a translation of the word to help them understand.

In question six, about the most surprising part of the challenge, students reported a variety of answers. One student was surprised by the number of Japanese people who can speak English. This is assuming that the students were talking to people from various backgrounds: restaurant owners, workers in the Foreign Buyers Club, the women working at the Information Desks. These Japanese people are all in industries that require some amount of English. Another student reported that there were "many expressions in English." Another student proudly announced that they could "speak English with strangers!" A final comment from a more language proficient student: "Freshmen can speak English a lot! I didn't know that! Compare [sic]

with me (when I was freshmen) they are so great." This student has studied abroad and gained a highly proficient level of English. Reflecting upon her own experiences, the student was encouraged and surprised by the current level of English being used by the lower-level students.

The students were divided into three teams, and question seven asked each team to choose an English "Most Valuable Player". In the group of nine students, there were three males; one male per team: one lower level, and two higher level. All three teams voted their male teammate as the MVP. It is difficult to interpret this. Perhaps the male students took on a high level of responsibility within the groups by doing a lot of the speaking. None of the students answered the question "Why" they chose the particular student.

Question eight asked if it was more difficult to speak English with strangers or with their teammates. The responses to this question mostly indicated that speaking to anyone was not a problem. One student reported: "We pretend we are Chinese, so it wasn't difficult for us to speak English to the strangers. I wanna do that again!"

The final question, nine, asked the students to give comments about the day as well as suggestions about how to improve the challenge for the future. One student asked that an English-English vocabulary list or glossary be provided for the more challenging words. Another student said, "We need more adventure stuff like Rokko (get wet, crime free)." This student is referring to climbing into a small river to find a clue. The crime free reference may mean doing an exciting task that is not criminal, or it could perhaps be a joke. In a personal communication, another student explained a similar idea. The students went to Tokyu Hands, a Japanese department store, and were trying on all of the costumes and masks in the Halloween department. The student mentioned that they were speaking English, so the staff

left the group alone; however, the student felt that if the team members had been speaking Japanese, they would have been told to leave the store.

Finally, the students seemed to like solving clues. It seemed to give them a sense of satisfaction. As a final note, many comments from the student survey said: "I wanna do it again!" The number of comments like this from students in the survey, from the wrap up party, and from communications between the students and teachers in the hallway at the university between classes, indicate that highly motivated students can complete a day-long challenge to speak English only.

Future Directions

The less language proficient students reported saying spontaneous automatic responses in Japanese, whereas the upper-level students did not. Perhaps in future attempts, a glossary could be provided to the students to inform them of appropriate responses. Instead of using "*oishii*" they can be directed toward "delicious," "tasty," or "yummy." Additionally, the questionnaire could be more specifically tailored, especially with regard to whether speaking English to Japanese or foreigners is more difficult. A better understanding of student unease could help future researchers and 24-Hour Challenge implementers design better tasks. A final direction would be to have the students design and implement the event regularly and independently based on the experience of the teachers and past participants. This first challenge was entirely created by teachers, but in order to fulfil the idea of student autonomy, the students would need to be creating and organizing future events themselves. Ideally, this event could be annual or even monthly, and new events with different themes but using the same template could be created.

Conclusion

Overall the researchers consider the project a success. Students operated almost completely in English for the whole day, and at times went to surprisingly great lengths to do so. Participants reported the experience to be very enjoyable; not only students who attended but also other students who did not go repeatedly asked the researchers for the event to be implemented again. Surprisingly, students created a similar English-Only Challenge event the following month. The drive to have a similar event was so strong, the students, from different grades, made all the arrangements themselves. Students of different years made connections that they normally would not make. These connections were strengthened through a Facebook group created by the researchers that was dedicated to the 24-Hour Challenge and filled with many student photos, videos, and comments.

While the challenge did not extend to a full 24 hours, for most students it spanned 10 or 11 hours, a majority of the waking hours of their day. Furthermore, the 24-Hour Challenge is a mark that can be aimed at, both by students seeking to immerse themselves in L2 communication as well as for instructors struggling for ways to get students to practice L2 outside the language-learning classroom.

Bio Data

Kelly Butler is currently a student of the Turkish language and will be entering a new phase of her teaching career, teaching high school, in August at Terakki Foundation School in Istanbul. She has taught English in the US and Japan, and has a Masters of Linguistics from the University of Oregon.

Jon Watkins is a full-time lecturer at Kwansei Gakuin Daigaku, Uegahara Campus. He is interested in finding new ways to establish and preserve an English-only atmosphere, even in Japan. Additionally, he is interested in creative and challenging computer-driven projects designed to aid language acquisition.

Michael Wilkins has been teaching in Japan for over 12 years. He currently works at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. His research interests include CALL, student autonomy, and content-based instruction.

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Appendix A: *Participant Questionnaire*

Congratulations! You've just finished the 24-Hour Challenge! Tell us a few things:

1. Be honest! Did you speak *any* Japanese during today's Challenge? What did you say? Why?
   Since I took the oath I have spoken in Japanese
   (a) zero times
   (b) 1-5 times
   (c) 6-15 times
   (d) more than 16 times

2. What was the most difficult task?

3. Which task was the most fun or interesting?

4. What was the biggest challenge to speaking only English?

5. What new English words did you learn?

6. What was the most surprising thing about today's challenge?

7. Who is your team's **English Only MVP**? Why?

8. What was more difficult —talking in English to strangers or talking in English to your teammates?

9. Any comments you'd like to tell us? Anything we could do to make this Challenge better?

Appendix B: *Participant Instructions*

24-Hour Challenge Instructions

- Each group will get an envelope with one clue. Your group must figure out the clue and go the correct location.

- Each place will have a clue, photo opportunity, or have a task that you must complete. Usually one clue will tell you how to get to the next clue.

- The last location will have important information and tickets for the next location. Don't lose these tickets!

- You have about 60 minutes in each location.

- Try to video as much of your English speaking as you can!

- Each student is receiving 500 yen. Use it wisely; it may be needed to complete some tasks.

- Clues will contain a phone number. Only call this number if you have not found the clue after the amount of time for the clue is up. Or call this number if you have a serious problem (someone is sick or injured).

Appendix C: *Photo Safari Instructions*

Photo Safari Extra Points
In addition to each clue and task, if you collect photos of these things, you'll earn extra points. The team with the most points at the end of the day gets a special prize.
In each location you may take up to three (3) pictures with three different foreigners:

- Pictures of Foreigners alone, unaware that you're taking a picture: 1 Point

- Pictures of Foreigner alone, smiling and looking at your camera: 3 Points

- Pictures of Foreigners with your team (you'll need to ask them if it's OK): 5 points

- Pictures of T-shirts with fun/crazy English. You can take as many as you see.

- Fun/Crazy T-Shirt with English: 1 Point

- English Grammar/Spelling mistake on T-Shirt: 3 Points

  » 2 Point bonus if you can explain why the grammar/spelling is incorrect!

- T-Shirt with English Words that do not make any sense: 5 Points

Pictures of dogs...

- Normal dog: 1 Point
  Dog wearing little doggy sweater: 3 Points
  Dog being carried in purse or handbag: 5 Points

Other pictures:

- A picture of the entire team in a phone booth: 2 points

- Picture of a vehicle that is not bike, car, bus, or train: 1 Point
- Picture of a bicycle with more than two wheels: 1 Point
- Picture of someone wearing something camouflage: 2 Points
- Picture of someone wearing traditional Japanese clothing (kimono, yukata, etc.): 2 Points
- 2 Minute Video of impromptu Yosakoi starring three team members: 3 Points
- Video of a team member asking directions in English: 4 points (Limit 1 video per group)
- Video of funniest conversation: 5 points
- Video of best group karaoke song in English: 5 points