Effective Language Patterns in the Classroom

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This paper begins with a discussion of the importance of teacher and student beliefs in the learning process. The main body of the paper offers practical suggestions on how to convey these beliefs to students through the usage of effective language patterns including Yes-Sets, modal operators, and embedded suggestions. Advice on delivering suggestions using analogue marking is also discussed. In order to quantify the effects of language pattern usage, a study was conducted and the results are reported in the second part of this paper. The paper concludes with a short summary of a research study, which was aimed at quantifying the benefits of these language patterns in the language learning process.

この論文は学習過程における、先生・生徒の信念の重要性に関するディスカッションからスタートする。文の主体はそれら信念をイエス・セット、様相論理演算、埋め込み形の提言などを含む効果的な言語パターンを使い、生徒にどうやって伝達するかについて実践的な方法を提案する。アナログマーキングを用いた提言伝達のアドバイスについても言及されている。この論文は言語習得過程におけるこれらの言語パターンの利益を測定することを目的とした研究の手短な要約で結ばれている。

F YOU have applied for a teaching job at a Japanese university recently, you may have been asked to write an essay outlining your beliefs about language teaching. While this may seem like just another hurdle to cross, thinking about your own beliefs and making them explicit can be a powerful exercise. A famous quotation attributed to Henry Ford says, "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't—you're right," and there is increasing psychological research, particularly from the field of self-efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1997) that our beliefs are powerful frames that determine how we perceive the world.

Teachers are in positions of influence, and whether a teacher's beliefs are implicitly or explicitly held, they will have a strong effect on the amount and type of learning that takes place in any course. We begin this paper by suggesting that teachers can benefit greatly by explicitly deciding the beliefs that they wish to hold as important and the beliefs that they wish to convey to their students about learning. We then offer specific examples of effective language patterns that have been shown to help learners take on beliefs that will support their language acquisition. These language patterns are drawn from hypnotherapy (Bandler & Grinder, 1975a; Grinder, DeLozier, & Bandler, 1977) and neuro-linguistic programming (Bandler & Grinder, 1975b, 1976). We conclude with a summary of a research study that we are undertaking to quantify the effects of these language patterns. This study, in particular, examined the effec-

tiveness of language patterns as an intervention for stimulating the writing speeds of university freshman students using a control and experimental group over a longitudinal time frame. The study explored the following research questions:

1. Did the timed-writing intervention have an impact on the experimental group's ability to increase their writing speed?

2. What were the differences, if any, in the number of words written between the experimental and control group?

Useful Beliefs

Most of our beliefs are formed by consciously or unconsciously modeling the people around us. Vygotsky (cited in Lock, 1989) suggested that every function in cultural development actually appears twice, "first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals" (p. 59). In other words, we perceive the beliefs of influential others and eventually internalize those beliefs within our own cognitive systems. A teacher in a classroom has the attention of students for long periods of time and is certainly in a position to influence student beliefs, and teachers' expectations and beliefs have been recognized for many years as a powerful shaper of learner performance.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) analyzed teacher expectations and demonstrated the effects on teacher behavior in the areas of socio-emotional climate (e.g., smiling, nodding), input (e.g., the amount of learning material given to students), output (e.g., repeating or rephrasing questions), and affective feedback (e.g., the amount of criticism and praise). In a later review of studies spurred by the original research, Rosenthal (1980) noted that "altogether, 345 studies have been conducted and they show be-

yond doubt that interpersonal self-fulfilling prophecies not only occur, but that their average size of effect is far from trivial" (p. 156). More recent reviews of the research in this area (Raths, McAninch, & McAninch, 2003) strengthened this view by noting that many teacher beliefs are "incompatible or inconsistent" (p. 3) and that these beliefs can be "stumbling blocks" (p. 2) to student learning.

Teacher expectations and beliefs become self-fulfilling prophecies, yet many teachers do not take the time to consider the beliefs that they consciously and unconsciously convey to students. Perhaps even more important to consider are the beliefs that we *want* to hold or *want* our students to hold. Some of the desired beliefs that we elicited from participants in a recent presentation (Cullen, Deacon, Backwell, & Mulvey, 2012) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. A Sample of Teachers' Desired Beliefs

As a teacher, I want to believe . . .	I want my students to believe . . .
I'm doing the best that I can do.	It's okay to make mistakes.
I'm well prepared.	English will be very useful in my life.
I have my students' best interests at heart.	I am able to learn English.
These students are capable of learning.	I will learn new skills and knowledge in this course.
My classroom is a fun and safe environment for learning.	My teacher can be trusted and has my best interests at heart. I can go to my teacher with questions and concerns.

In the next section, we will introduce several language patterns and techniques that can be used to convey these beliefs effectively to students, which include Yes-Sets, embedded suggestions, and modal operators.

Effective Language Patterns

Yes-Sets

After reading about the power of beliefs, you may have begun to consider some of your own beliefs and the ways that they are impacting your student's learning. In addition, you may be wondering about how language patterns can be structured effectively to deliver more empowering learning beliefs and other messages to your students. Yes-Sets are one way to achieve this goal.

In a Yes-Set we *pace* people with a series of statements with which they are likely to agree. These are also known as "truisms." Truisms are effective for pacing because they create a momentum towards "Yes" which then makes it easier to *lead* people in the direction that you want them to go. Yes-Sets are a particularly useful language pattern in classroom situations because teachers are often leading their students in directions that necessitate focused attention on various materials, activities, language features, and amongst others, the teacher himself or herself. A Yes-Set can be an elegant way to gain rapport by first pacing students then leading them to where we want to focus their attention. A good rule of thumb is to use about four or five of these truisms before leading students to a desired goal.

So, how specifically can we apply Yes-Sets in order to pace and lead our students in the classroom? Imagine for a moment that you want your students to review their former lesson before starting something new. You could simply say, "Okay everyone, today we are going to begin by reviewing our last lesson before starting today's lesson." In all likelihood, however, some students will have forgotten what was done in the previous lesson, some may have been absent, and others may not yet be in a settled state to learn. With a Yes-Set, they can be gently guided to recall what was covered in the former lesson before they actually review and practice what they had previously learned (or did not learn, as the case may be).

Thus, a teacher could use the following Yes-Set pattern to review the former lesson:

1) Hello everyone. It's a lovely sunny day and *we are here to learn English together again*; 2) You might *remember that last class we focused on the topic of* _____ (substitute your topic, e.g., sports); 3) And in our last lesson we (substitute what you did, e.g., listened to a dialogue about various sports; learned some collocations such as *do*, *play*, and *go* that connect to various sports; and practiced conversations); 4) And *you can remember those activities that we did now*; 5) And that means *we can begin by* _____ (doing the activity that you want students to do, e.g., reviewing the sports collocations).

You will likely notice that the pacing occurred in #1 – #4 and the leading occurred in #5. The students will also likely agree with the pacing patterns, and will then participate more readily in the leading step.

Yes-Sets can also be effective, not only in order to lead students to do various activities but also to get them into more resourceful learning states such as curiosity, relaxation, and excitement. To lead students into a state of relaxation, for instance, we could substitute the following sentence in place of #5 above: "And that means *you can relax as we review our previous lesson*." (Note: See the section below on analogue marking to amplify this example of relaxation even further.)

So, in this section we focused on Yes-Sets including: what they are, how they are structured via pacing (truisms) and leading,

and some examples of how they can be used as effective language patterns in the classroom. Now you can design a Yes-Set to use with your own students.

Modal Operators to Embed Suggestions

One of the great things about modal operators for creating suggestions is that they can seem to create a choice for the students. Sometimes, of course, that choice is an illusory choice. In other words, we are really only pretending to give our students a choice by using the options that satisfy our goals and objectives. Another lovely thing about modal operators is that they make it easy to embed suggestions for our students.

The following example illustrates the combination of modal operators and embedded suggestions (the underlined parts are spoken in an emphasized manner) that teachers could use with students: "You can *do your homework* tonight, or you could *do your homework* on the weekend. It's really your choice when you decide to *do your homework*."

Some useful modal operators include:

You could …	You have to …	You might …
You can …	You may …	You might …
You will …	You would …	You shall …
You should …	You ought to …	You don't have to …

The following examples show further ways that modal operators can be used in teaching contexts for the purpose of encouraging various learning outcomes:

- You could *begin to enjoy learning English* in this course, or perhaps you have always enjoyed English, and you might *start to enjoy English even more*.
- You don't have to *enjoy English as much as your favorite music*,

and you might not even *enjoy English as much as your favorite food*; you may just choose to *make English your favorite subject*, or perhaps you just ought to *think of English as a great communication tool*. And you may be wondering how you can *get the most out of this lesson.*
- You will sometimes make mistakes . . . and it's good to *know that mistakes can be useful*, and you can l*earn from your mistakes.*
- You shouldn't *enjoy learning English* too quickly because you want to *continue learning English all your life*.
- You shouldn't *believe every word that I say* just because I'm your teacher . . . you can *believe me* because I give you your grade.

In summary, you don't have to use all of these modal operators with your own students. Instead, you may enjoy designing your own and then noticing how the results help your own students to achieve greater results.

Delivering Suggestions

To this point, we have introduced Yes-Sets, modal operators, and embedded suggestions as effective language patterns as tools for encouraging more effective learning. However, *how* you say something is just as important as *what* you say. Of course, people use embedded suggestions unconsciously all the time, but you could choose to really motivate your students by taking the time to consciously construct and embed suggestions throughout your classes in order to: (a) motivate your students; (b) help your students learn English more easily; and (c) make a difference in your students' learning and lives.

Analogue Marking

In this section we will explore analogue marking as a way to embed powerful learning messages in our students. Analogue

marking is a simple process that can give impressive results. The idea of analogue marking is that you are marking out certain words in a sentence or paragraph with the purpose of giving a suggestion consciously or subconsciously to your students. Analogue marking can happen in various forms: talking to the class, using body language, or writing messages on the board. Table 2 offers various examples of each.

Table 2. Some Types of Analogue Marking

Voice	Body	Writing
Slightly pausing Making changes in pitch/speed/tonality	Changing positions in the room Gesturing Tapping the desk	Using various colors Underlining words Circling words

Even without being aware of it, you have already used analogue marking many times in your life. For example, most teachers have said to a noisy class, "Everybody please BE QUIET." The most important words were BE QUIET, so they were marked, or stressed, and said louder. This is an example of analogue marking. The important part of the message was highlighted by changing the volume of the voice.

Another way to analogue mark is to use pauses effectively by pausing before and after key words. If, for instance, one of your core teaching beliefs is that it is okay for students to make mistakes, then you might start a class discussion by saying,

So, we're going to talk with our partners and remember to keep talking even if you make a mistake because . . . everyone makes mistakes . . . and it's okay to make mistakes

. . . mistakes are small steps to learning . . . so with that in mind, let's start.

Another form of analogue marking to stress key words is the use of body language. In the classroom when a teacher wants students to start conversing with their partners the teacher could say, "Are you ready to talk? Go!" (handclap). The handclap, the pause, and the word *Go* are all ways to analogue mark the start of a student conversation. Students recognize the meanings of these markings and immediately initiate dialogue. When done consistently, the effect is amplified as students are on task immediately, thus saving valuable learning time.

So far we have considered voice volume, pausing, and body language as forms of analogue marking. Here is an example of how all of these were structured together at the start of a class recently. The teacher wanted to remind the students that learning English can be fun, so after the Yes-Set, the teacher said:

Today we're going to . . . continue the fun work . . . we started last week. And remember the research from last class that found students who are *happy and relaxed (*slightly louder) learn 25% more. So, it's okay to . . . get comfortable now . . . as we start class. And you can turn to your partner who will help you *practice and learn English.* So *enjoy* a 1-minute warm up conversation with your partner about the homework. Are you ready? Go! (handclap).

All the forms of analogue marking shown thus far powerfully send messages we believe will be useful to students in their learning process.

One more form of analogue marking is visual marking such as with the color of chalk. When we write a message on the board, we can highlight the key point in a different color, or underline it, as in the following: "Answer the questions on page 67." This is a powerful and simple visual marking technique. Of

course, we can also make the key words bigger too. Below, we offer one more example of a teacher's instructions notated with the three types of analogue marking we have explored so far through <u>pausing</u> before delivering the suggestion, using *timbre* (changing voice tone while delivering the suggestion), and through **kinesthetic** application (such as a tap on the desk while delivering the suggestion).

> So, today we're going to, <u>continue the fun work</u>, we started last week. And remember the research from last class that found students who are *happy and relaxed* learn 25% more. So it's okay to **get comfortable now** as we start class. And you might be wondering who will be your *<u>interesting and mysterious</u>*, new partner today, who will be helping you to *practice and learn English*.

So, as you continue and think about the use of analogue marking to reinforce the beliefs and suggestions you offer your students, you could choose to explore . . . or you might just like to play with analogue marking . . . in your next class.

Quantifying the Results of Language Pattern Use

To this point we have offered several examples of language patterns and how they can be used to convey more facilitative learning beliefs and suggestions to students. Our aim has been to invite the reader to consider ways that these language patterns can be delivered in the classroom to more consistently communicate empowering messages to students.

In the final section of this paper, we describe a condensed version of a study on Timed Writing, one of several ongoing research studies we are carrying out in order to quantify the effects of language pattern usage in the classroom.

Language Patterns and Writing Activities

In the timed-writing activity (see Elbow, 1981; Goldberg, 1986) several guidelines were adopted for students: (a) write as much as possible; (b) use a pen, not a pencil, and simply cross off any mistakes; (c) don't use a dictionary, instead write unknown words in the L1 and carry on; and (d) focus on fluency rather than grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Furthermore, the students were given simple topics of personal relevance as it was believed that they would be able to focus more on their writing fluency within the 10-minute fixed time period if the topics were within their realm of present knowledge and lexical capacity.

Participants

The study was conducted within the framework of a coordinated English language program at a 4-year private Japanese university. The 36 participants were 18-to-19-year-old students who were in required 1st-year writing classes for non-English majors. They attended one 90-minute class every week for two 15-week semesters. Although they had been streamed to the advanced level within the program, their general level of English proficiency actually ranged from low intermediate to advanced. A placement test given prior to commencing the course showed that the students could be evenly divided into two levels.

Procedures

The students were divided into two groups: Group 1 (the control group, $n = 20$), and Group 2 (the experimental group, $n = 16$). A baseline was set up in the first lesson by measuring the initial writing speed of all students by simply giving them a topic and asking them to write as much as possible within the 10-minute fixed time frame. Over a period of 10 weeks, Group 1 was told to write as many words as possible within the

fixed time limit. Group 2, on the other hand, was given numerous suggestions in the form of language patterns (including Yes-Sets, modal operators of possibility, and other embedded suggestions) prior to writing. The results were measured across three weekly time frames: weeks 2-4, weeks 5-7, and weeks 8-10, in order to demonstrate any differences that emerged over the initial, middle, and concluding phases of the timed-writing period. Over the course of a semester, it was hypothesized that Group 2 would show greater gains in writing speed.

Results

Group 2 made significant progress in its writing speed compared with Group 1 (see Table 3).

The initial baseline demonstrated that Group 2 was already ahead of Group 1 by 24 average words. However, by the end of the 10-week time frame, Group 2 had increased their average writing speed by 48 words, while Group 1's average had only increased by 17 words from the initial baseline measurement. The results also show that Group 2 increased their writing speed at each of the three time-period measurements: +34, +13, and + 1 words; whereas Group 1 averaged +19, -2, and +0 over the same three time-period measurements. Clearly, Group 2 made more consistent and overall gains than Group 1 during the course of the timed-writing activity study.

In answer to the two research questions above, it is clear from these results that the experimental group did benefit from the intervention. In fact, they made consistent incremental gains across each of the three time periods, whereas the control group remained relatively flat across the same time periods.

Conclusion

Based on the results, it seems that language patterns may have had an impact on the students' ability to write faster in the timed-writing activity. In future research, we will study this impact in more depth. For now, we will make some tentative conclusions.

First, careful use of language patterns by teachers appears to help students to get into appropriate learning states that allow them to more fully focus on the goals (such as writing faster) of their lessons.

Second, students can achieve more when they are guided to first imagine what it is that we want them do through the suggested beliefs provided by language patterns, resulting in an enhanced ability to achieve what it is that we actually want them to do in the leading process.

Third, simply leading students to our desired outcomes is not enough; rather, they can achieve more when they are adequately

Table 3. Average Words Written by Group 1 (Control) and Group 2 (Experimental)

	Baseline (Sept. 21)	Weeks 2-4 (Sept. 28 – Oct. 12)	Weeks 5-7 (Oct. 19 – Nov. 2)	Weeks 8-10 (Nov. 9 – 23)	Baseline vs. Weeks 8-10
Group 1 (Control)	109	128	126	126	+ 17
Group 2 (Experimental)	133	167	180	181	+ 48

paced beforehand. Teachers can have an impact on a student's success through the language they use to structure classroom activities.

Thus, it is not only crucial that we become more aware of the language patterns that we are actually using with our students now, but we should also structure our language to facilitate greater learning. In doing so, we can create more empowering messages for our students, which, in turn, will support their learning potential.

Note. We invite any teachers who are interested in replicating or extending these studies to contact us. We also have a collection of useful language patterns and scripts that we are happy to share with other teachers.

Bio Data

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