



## Torrin Shimono & James Nobis

TLT Interviews brings you direct insights from leaders in the field of language learning, teaching, and education—and you are invited to be an interviewer! If you have a pertinent issue you would like to explore and have access to an expert or specialist, please make a submission of 2,000 words or less.

Email: [interviews@jalt-publications.org](mailto:interviews@jalt-publications.org)

Welcome to the March/April edition of TLT Interviews! For this issue, we are happy to bring you two extremely interesting interviews. The first interview is with Dr. Ken Beatty, who is a TESOL professor at Anaheim University. He has worked in secondary schools and universities in Asia, the Middle East, and North and South America, lecturing on language teaching and computer-assisted language learning. He is the author of *Teaching and Researching Computer-Assisted Language Learning* and more than 100 student textbooks, and has given more than 500 teacher-training sessions and 100-plus conference presentations in 33 countries. He was interviewed by Aviva Ueno, an assistant professor in the Faculty of International Studies at Meiji Gakuin University in Yokohama, Japan, whose main areas of interest are using technology to facilitate language acquisition, maintaining learner motivation and promoting reflective practice. She holds an MA in TESOL from Anaheim University. So, without further ado, to our first interview!

## An Interview with Dr. Ken Beatty

Aviva Ueno

Meiji Gakuin University

**Aviva Ueno:** *Dr. Beatty, could I begin by asking you your opinion on what challenges today's teachers of English in universities in Japan face?*

**Dr. Ken Beatty:** Teachers worldwide face many of the same challenges—dealing with issues of time, resources, and motivation. Bureaucracy steals time. Budgets cut resources. For these first two, teachers need to become more involved in their professions, being the change they want to see.

But the greatest challenge is motivation, often because students are more concerned with passing English exams than learning the language in ways that will help them use it productively, and in ways that make them want to be lifelong learners. What's the solution? Teachers need to balance offering exam strategies with raising awareness of the benefits—and joys—of learning English.

*Teachers in Japan are encouraged to conduct research, but have challenges around expertise, ideas, and time. How should teachers become beginner researchers, and what common mistakes should they avoid?*

Most teachers are already researchers; they follow a classic Action Research cycle of noticing a problem in the classroom, trying something innovative to see if it can help, then evaluating it and, either carrying on, or trying something else. Teachers simply need to formalize that process and take the final step of making the findings public, that is, through publishing or conference presentation, or both. Publishing attracts feedback, first by reviews and then by comments by readers or conference attendees.

Teachers looking for research topics should consider local problems and also what is going exceptionally well in their classrooms. For example, what are the qualities of the successful language learner? And how do interventions of methodology, materials, and/or technology help?

As for mistakes, the most common one is failing to review the literature. The great scientist Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further, it has been by standing on the shoulders of giants." He meant that we benefit from building on others' research. See what's already been written in print or online about an issue, and then build on it.

As for time constraints and lack of research experience, reach out to others. Three people who have not done any research will at least have more ideas than one beginner researcher. Or, better yet, reach out to others who have done research and published. Most researchers are eager to collaborate and communicating online makes it easy.

*Advances in technology that make online learning more accessible and economical threaten some classroom teachers. What are your thoughts on digital language learning, and what can teachers do to avoid becoming obsolete?*

My own PhD is in computer-assisted language learning, and I would love to believe that someone could solely use a computer to learn a language. But despite decades of research and countless applica-

tions, human teachers still seem more effective and efficient than machines.

Part of the reason is that computer programs cannot motivate students or adapt to their personal needs as well as teachers can. To keep relevant, there are three skills that teachers should maintain and develop: Be personal. Be local. Be innovative. At the same time, embrace new technologies and learn ways to integrate them into the classroom. An old truth: Technology won't replace teachers, but teachers who can use technology will replace those teachers who cannot.

*Still on the technology theme, although mobile devices can be great teaching and learning tools, they can also distract students who use their devices in ways unrelated to the class, such as browsing social media. How should teachers respond?*

For better or worse, mobile phones are here to stay in the classroom. But a teacher who keeps students deeply engaged with their lessons should not have to worry about them socializing on their phones.

The other question is whether teachers can find ways to make better use of phones in the classroom. Prensky (2005) talks about doing old things in old ways, old things in new ways, and new things in new ways. An example of the first is writing an essay by hand, and the second would be writing an essay on a computer. We want to move to the third option—doing new things in new ways—such as having students complete media projects on phones.

I've been working this past year on an innovative new Pearson adult series, StartUp, that does just that. The final task in each unit is a review, but rather than the usual mini-test on fragments of what students have been taught, a media project gives them the chance to show what they know and asks them to personalize and localize the unit's content and skills by using their phones to create a series of photos or a short video. To successfully complete the task, students are forced to think deeply about what they've learned and integrate a wide range of skills.

*At TESOL 2019, I really enjoyed your presentation about Flipped Learning. How can teachers flip their classes? Would it work well in Japan, considering that many learners are accustomed to a more passive approach to language learning?*

Passive students tend to enter the classroom like it's a video, expecting to be entertained. It's no way to build life-long learners who need to adapt to changes in technology and society. Flipped Learning shifts responsibility from the teacher to the students. Students do more of their language learning outside

of class, and class time is more about using the language and focusing on students' key questions.

Flipped Learning is the new reality because there are never enough classroom hours to truly learn a language. With every class composed of a range of students, we need a better approach than simply teaching to the middle and having less-able learners frustrated and more-able learners bored.

Flipped learning, particularly combined with technology, can overcome this problem. For example, rather than having students encounter audio clips or videos in class once or twice, students who need more time can preview and review, listening or watching them ten times or a hundred times on their phones. If they still have questions, they are more confident about asking them next class.

*If you hadn't become a teacher, what would you be doing now?*

When not teaching, I spend most of my time writing textbooks. But my master's degree was in playwrighting, and if I don't have a project on hand, I still write each day—stories, poems, plays, and fragments of novels. So, I might have become a full time (and likely poor) writer of fiction. Perhaps it's my next career.

*If you were to write an autobiography, what would the title be? Why?*

Making \_\_\_\_\_ Memorable: Fill in the Blank. My biggest job when both teaching and writing textbooks is to make learning memorable. The interactive blank in my autobiography title would be to encourage others to reflect on that, making what they do good enough and important enough for others to remember. Perhaps they can do so by creating a garden, doing a job a little bit better than necessary, or simply loving and helping others.

In the end, we live a short time, we try to make a difference, and we whisper to the universe, "Remember me."

*Thank you so much for all of your wonderful insights and advice, and for making this a truly memorable interview!*

## References

- Beatty, K. (Series Consultant) (2019). *StartUp* (Levels 1-8). New York: Pearson.
- Prensky, M. (2005, December 2). *Shaping tech for the classroom*. Edutopia. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/adopt-and-adapt-shaping-tech-for-classroom>

For our second interview, we feature a stimulating discussion with Paula Kalaja, Professor Emerita at University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Professor Kalaja has been a major pioneer in researching the beliefs, identities, and attributions of language learners and teachers using their own drawings and written life stories. She has been leading the advance on narrative research in the field of second language learning by conducting innovative research, co-editing a special issue of the *Applied Linguistics Review* (Kalaja & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2018) on visual methodologies, and spearheading four major edited volumes, including the recent book, *Visualising multilingual lives: More than words* (Kalaja & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). She was interviewed by Joseph Falout, who researches psychology in language learning and teaching. His collaborations include originating the theoretical and applied concepts of *Ideal Classmates* and *Critical Participatory Looping*. He edits for the *JALT OnCUE Journal* and *Asian EFL Journal*.

Now, to the second interview!

## Researching Multilingual Lives with Visual Narratives: An Interview with Paula Kalaja

Joseph Falout

Nihon University

**Joseph Falout:** *Why is the field of applied linguistics taking off in a new direction known as the multilingual turn?*

**Paula Kalaja:** The multilingual turn is somehow acknowledging what the world is like. With global communication, travel, and migration so common these days, there are so many multilingual people. And for some, such as immigrants, they are not being recognized for already knowing a number of languages, but unfortunately recognized only for not knowing the official language of the country they are trying to enter. They are considered unintelligent, treated as second-class citizens, and left unemployed. This is what is happening now in Finland too, with, among others, a flood of refugees from Asia and the Middle East. They are offered courses to learn Finnish and receive assistance in looking for jobs. But if they don't have enough Finnish—even those who are highly competent professionals such as computer engineering majors—they end up sweeping the floors.

The perspective of multilingualism, however, helps us acknowledge that multilingualism is prevalent throughout the world. We can then begin asking new questions. What are the minds of multilinguals like? Do you treat the first and second languages as separate things? Because that's the traditional way of teaching and researching in second language acquisition. The native speaker used to be the model of learning. But now, it's argued that native speakers don't possess full competence in the language. So, all of this makes a difference in the aims of teaching and testing foreign languages. For example, if a Finnish student writes an English essay and includes one word in Finnish because the student doesn't know the word in English, it is considered a major mistake. The teacher treats this word as an error instead of acknowledging it and making use of all the language resources that the student has. And it's okay for the reader, the English teacher who is Finnish, because the reader happens to know both of those languages. Do students and teachers have to stick to using only one language? If you grow up multilingual, you keep switching languages all the time. This is called *translanguaging*, and it's acceptable in most daily use. But in some formal contexts, it may *not* be acceptable. So, once you start taking a multilingual perspective, the world might look very different.

Let me relate it personally with my own research as a linguist. For a number of years, I was involved in two major research projects funded by the Finnish government to trace the development of second language writing skills. There was a huge pool of data collected longitudinally and cross-sectionally, following learners of various ages of Finnish, Swedish, or English as a foreign language. The data traced the learner's abilities to produce specific types of genres, including narrative texts, argumentative texts, and email messages to friends and to teachers. To me, that kind of research objectively traces the linguistic features used by our learners. But there was so much more we were missing. When I started researching with drawings, or visual narratives, and written life stories of learner experiences, they showed me there is much more to learning a language than mastering its grammar and vocabulary, or using it appropriately. People learning about using more than one language have different stances to the languages, which gets down to their emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and identities. This requires a subjective approach to researching their subjective experience, or their *lived experience*, as multilinguals. And that's my passion.

*Could you describe researching lived experiences with visual narratives?*