

## ■ 研究論文

### 【概 要】

Japanese Students' Foreign Language Acquisition  
Learner Autonomy: Actual Situation and Some  
Suggestions for its Promotion

## 外国語学習における日本人学生の自律性 — その現状と自律性の促進への提案 —

Ralph Degen (ラルフ・デーゲン)

This paper tries to outline Japanese students' autonomous learning capabilities by contrasting behaviour patterns and characteristics that are considered supportive to successful language learning with those that Japanese university students show in the process of learning their second or third language. It pleads for a systematic and explicit promotion of more autonomy in a university classroom context, in order to help students become more efficient language learners. The last chapter attempts to give some general procedures and sets of classroom activities that might help introduce routines of metacognitive considerations in tasks and exercises, leading to more self-reflection on the students' learning process as a basis for self-directed and successful language acquisition. Task orientated activities and projects that implicitly promote autonomous learning shall not be discussed in this paper for reasons of brevity although they are of vital importance.

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**1. Actual Situation of Japanese Students' Learner Autonomy**

It would certainly not be accurate to say that all Japanese students in general lack the skills and patterns of behaviour which characterize a successful and effective language learner, but I do think it is correct to say that the great majority do.<sup>1</sup> Indeed only very few students show a high level of proficiency in using communication strategies, intelligent guessing of meaning (inferencing) and induction of grammatical patterns, or are able to efficiently plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. Furthermore, most of those few, who are able to do so, have been studying abroad for a period of time. The subject of this article will be the average student, of a national university not located at the upper end of the university ranking in Japan and being significantly higher than lower profile private universities. From my experience as a teacher, and the fact that most students have a very similar socialization as learners (especially, but not only as learners of a foreign language), I think it is justified to make some general statements on the situation of Japanese students' learner autonomy.

The state of things becomes evident, when we try to compare characteristics and patterns of successful language learners with those of Japanese students. Such characteristics have widely been discussed in the literature on second language acquisition (see Wenden 1991: 41 ff., Reiss 1983: 257 ff., Apeltauer 1997: 99 ff., Campadiou 1999: 156 ff., Nodari 1996: 5 etc.) and should be evident in a less explicit way to every successful and efficient language learner who is able to reflect on his or her own language learning process. Self-reflection or metacognitive knowledge is one of the main features of learner autonomy and reflecting on the process of one's own language acquisition will

inevitably lead to the application of communication strategies. It is therefore difficult to examine the subject of learner autonomy ignoring those other features that constitute efficient language learning. However, they will only be briefly mentioned, and the main concern of this paper is to focus on learner autonomy, which can mainly be characterized with the following three points:

- taking responsibility for one's own learning
- making own choices (of one's aims, materials, topics etc.)
- metacognitive knowledge (self-reflection: planning, monitoring and evaluation of one's learning process)

Contrasting the several points that describe a successful language learner with the characteristics of average Japanese university students, we will find that the latter are in almost every point the exact opposite of the former, which will explain the low success that foreign language classes in a totally Japanese environment have in regard to communicative competence in the target language. I do not want to analyze extensively the learner socialization in middle and high school (see Tomoda 2000), but will rather try to give a picture of the status quo and make some suggestions how to encourage learner autonomy in class, which I consider the best means to improve the situation.

### **1.1. Personality Variables**

Reiss (1983: 257 ff.) gives a set of personality variables which are considered positive for foreign language acquisition, such as assertiveness, emotional stability, adventurousness, self-esteem (confidence in one's own ability as a learner), spontaneity, impulsiveness and the will to take risks.

I think all of these features are extremely rare with Japanese students, especially in a classroom situation. Also, the fact that language classes at university for the most part are authoritarian, teacher centred and focused on the grammar translation method with sections of behaviouristic pattern drills does not promote these variables. Spontaneous statements (without reassurance from the student's neighbour) let alone risk taking and impulsiveness cannot be expected in class. More active student participation requires a stress-free and relaxed classroom atmosphere as well as group or pair work phases. But as experience shows even then a free talk or discussion (even in smaller groups) will be very difficult or even impossible in the most cases.

## 1.2. Attending to Form and Meaning (Cognitive Styles)

Successful language learners “know how to find, sort, analyze, synthesize, classify and retrieve relevant linguistic data” (Wenden 1991: 41). They are able to “distinguish relevant from irrelevant information” (Reiss 1983: 258) in order to focus on particular items without being distracted by other items in the background (see Longman 1992: *field independence*). They attend to form, constantly look for grammatical patterns by classifying schema, try to describe them by setting up hypotheses and systematically seek to verify them, for example by making new sentences with the self-induced grammar rules and then will have them checked. Making mistakes thereby is considered as a means of learning. Once such learners have gained some knowledge of the new language, they actively attempt to develop the target language into a separate reference system (Wenden 1991: 41). Efficient learners attend to meaning, are sensitive to connotative and sociocultural meaning and are good guessers. They actively search for contextual clues and show tolerance of ambiguity.

Most Japanese students are used to getting all the grammar explicitly presented by the teacher and do not even have the idea of looking for structures by themselves. Hence they have not developed any strategies for the induction of grammatical patterns. In most cases they would not even try to connect newly-learned patterns to rules they have learned before. Data learned in class will usually not be connected together by students' own initiatives, but simply stored in order to reproduce it in a rather noncreative test situation. Most students do not even summarize what the teacher says, but simply copy what is written on the blackboard in order to learn it by heart without much reflection on the actual content. Even in most university classes, the teacher usually explains and translates every new word and sentence of the target language, without giving the students a chance of inferencing meaning independently. Hence students have not developed inferencing strategies and most students only feel safe and are willing to react when they “have totally understood”, which usually implicates a translation by the teacher. Tolerance of ambiguity obviously cannot develop because of fear of mistakes, punishment and embarrassment. Pattern drill practices are often done without even realizing the meaning of the sentences.

## 1.3. Communication Strategies

Successful language learners have a set of compensatory strategies, which allows them to communicate in their target language (even though their proficiency is not yet developed very far) such as topic avoidance, paraphrase and circumlocution, word coinage,

conscious transfer, appeal for assistance, mime and gesture etc. (see Bialystok 1990: 29 ff. and Batten 2002a).

In the case of Japanese students, Batten (2002a) mentions a set of strategies for the avoidance of communication, such as appeals for sympathy, silence, avoiding eye contact, smiling, looking at another student or making L1 linguistic responses. Also in this regard, a positive classroom atmosphere is extremely important to help students practice and apply positive communication strategies. Tasks like interviewing target language speakers outside class will in most cases not lead to the application of communication strategies without careful preparation and practice.

#### **1.4. Attitudes towards Learning**

Successful learners are willing to take responsibility for their learning (Wenden 1991: 53) and take an active approach to the learning task: "They select learning objectives for themselves and deliberately involve themselves in the second language" (Wenden 1991: 41). They seek correction and adopt a personal learning style.

As an example for learner responsibility, Scharle and Szabó (2000: 4) mention "interrupting the teacher's explanation to ask about a certain point in the explanation". This is something which basically never happens in class in Japan. In a Japanese classroom context it cannot even be put down to the students' lack of responsibility, but rather to a cultural taboo. But as we shall see later, this shows the exact dilemma that Japanese students have to face: the fact that their learning environment and socialization has prevented rather than supported a more responsible, active and autonomous attitude. In fact, students generally expect everything to be provided by the teacher. This is what Wenden (1991: 57) calls learned helplessness: Students consider themselves incapable of learning without detailed advice from the teacher.

#### **1.5. Metacognitive Knowledge**

Efficient language learners have insights into their own language learning styles (awareness). They are able to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning.

These metacognitive activities are obviously neither being encouraged in Japanese schools nor at university. The idea of self-reflecting and actively planning one's learning process is totally missing, since it is the role of the teacher to provide learning contents, styles and aims (usually tests) which are not to be scrutinized by the students. Their learning process is dominated by compulsion and control. The question of motivation and the aim of learning is not even considered which is fatal to the learning process, because these learning goals are supposed to be the basis of metacognitive considera-

tions when planning one's exercises. Illustrating this background, a tendency can be observed that students consider any activities and contents that are not directly connected to credit acquisition by learning and reproducing in a test situation as irrelevant.

Conclusively it can be said that the great majority of Japanese students have undergone an education that has promoted dependence rather than autonomy. Nevertheless, considering the following points, Japanese students do have great potential as language learners, if only they get the chance to develop their own learning styles. They are quite aware of the inefficiency of their English learning at school (Batten 2002a) and therefore show great flexibility and are eager to adapt to new teaching- and learning methods (Boeckmann 2003: 470). Japanese students' tendency towards obedience and their discipline could very well be used to introduce more efficient teaching and learning styles. First year students actually do have strong expectations for new forms of lessons, but also can "develop a stance of 'passive aggression'" (Batten 2002b: 35) when they are not met and the students are again confronted with an authoritarian, uncommunicative teaching style.

## **2. Why is Learner Autonomy so Important in a Japanese Context?**

Apart from the ideas that autonomy, as "the free choice of goals and relations" can be regarded "as an essential ingredient of individual well-being", or as an "intrinsic value in our lives" (Benson 2000: 112), and the liberal-humanist point of view "that without autonomy our lives are less than human" (Benson 2000: 114) which could possibly be interpreted as perceptions within a "western" cultural context and thus need not to be implemented into an East Asian or Japanese context, there are still some practical reasons, why learner autonomy should be encouraged in the Japanese educational system, and at least (and especially) in language classes at university. For highly motivated students, whose aim is to acquire communicative competence in a foreign language there are basically four ways to accomplish it: 1. they go to study abroad, 2. they are very lucky and get good language classes at university (well-trained teachers and a good curriculum<sup>2</sup>), 3. they take expensive private lessons, or 4. they take responsibility and autonomously organize their own learning process, consciously and systematically using the opportunities (materials, lessons, facilities, teachers' consulting hours, native speakers of the target language etc.), the university and the city where they live can offer.

For several reasons language programmes that actually lead to communicative competence in the target language are rather rare at Japanese universities. I only briefly want to mention the main reasons, since they have already been discussed in other pub-

lications. Most language classes, (especially those teaching students their third language), are not given by trained language teachers. Most Japanese teachers' fields of study is literature while applied linguistics is not part of their training, which leads to the fact that they simply "reproduce the way, they have learned their foreign language" (Slivensky/Boeckmann: 2000: 28), usually grammar translation approach, without much own initiative to update themselves with modern language teaching methodology. In fact, a large percentage of teachers of a second foreign language themselves only have rather limited communicative proficiency, which together with the fear of making mistakes, gives them no other choice than to avoid free communication in the classroom. Foreign teachers on the other hand are often only employed because they are native speakers and have some academic background. In many cases, they are not trained language teachers and especially in the case of English native speakers often are monolingual themselves, hence cannot fall back on their own experience as successful and efficient language learners. However, having said so, some teachers, Japanese as well as non-Japanese, do update themselves in the field of language teaching methodology on their own initiative and actually do provide very good lessons, but for a student it is a matter of chance which type of teacher he gets, since the quality of the lessons is not guaranteed.

Another field of problem in language education at most universities is the curriculum (Slivensky/Boeckmann: 2000: 25 ff.). Just to mention the main points, the number of lessons is often not enough, in many cases classes are not well coordinated<sup>3</sup>, large differences of students' level in class (no placement tests or streamlining), the onus to earn too many credits, so that nothing can be done more than superficially (not enough time left to learn outside class) etc. Another demotivating factor for students who actually want to learn a foreign language is the fact, that in many cases, they have to take classes together with masses of unmotivated students that are only interested in credit acquisition, hence the level of the class inevitably sinks and classroom atmosphere suffers.

Given these facts, learner autonomy would seem to be what motivated students need most. Another aspect to be considered is that autonomous learning itself is much more motivating than compulsive and controlled learning. More autonomy and the ability of metacognitive reflection should give students a chance to reconsider their own learner socialization and to overcome their learned helplessness. Most certainly this shift to more autonomous, self-directed and therefore more efficient learning has to be initiated through profound reforms of the education system<sup>4</sup>. But since this is not to be expected in the near future, it is the teachers' turn to encourage autonomy in their

classes. "Learner autonomy develops within the space that the teacher is able to open up for it in their interpretation of the broader constraints on the learners' freedom of action in learning." (Benson 2000: 116) Teachers' initiative is asked for here because language teachers at Japanese universities largely have the de facto freedom to do whatever they want in their classes.

### 3. Promoting Learner Autonomy Explicitly in Class

The issue of the various kinds of autonomy and their relevance to a Japanese university classroom context can, for reasons of brevity, not be discussed in this paper.<sup>5</sup> I would rather like to give some practical hints for a general procedure of explicitly introducing a more autonomous and self-directed attitude and way of thinking to Japanese university students.

For several reasons it appears to the author advisable to explicitly introduce autonomy as a topic to be talked about and to be practised in a language class context at university. Although Japanese students usually have no experience in talking about their learning process and strategies, they are adult learners with a high intellectual capability and do have the right to be included in the process of reorganizing the form of their language lessons, which actually is one of the main ideas of learner autonomy. "Self-directed learning does not arise by itself, it must be demanded and encouraged" (Rampillon 2000: 49) e.g., by explicit presentation and explanations, by demonstrations of learning, inferencing or induction strategies, and by discussions with and between the students (also see Boeckmann 2003: 473). As Wenden (1991: 55) states, "research in adult learning has shown that in some cases socialization processes lead to the acquisition of beliefs that encourage dependence rather than independence on the part of the adult." Non-autonomous learners tend to cling to their learning techniques, even if they realize that they are rather inefficient, because they lack of metacognitive knowledge to successfully replace them (see Nodari 1994: 43). Another factor to be considered is a distrust of the intentions of the teacher who is introducing an unknown methodology into the language class. Aoki and Smith (1999: 26) quote a student: "It was a form of class I'd never experienced. I didn't trust you in the beginning. I kept wondering, Is it really OK to do this?', 'Is she really going to be true to her words?'" This statement illustrates the legacy of Japanese students' language education at high school, which makes them suspicious of any contents that cannot be regarded as data to be reproduced in a test situation. Explicit talks and discussions of metacognitive matters can and should be made in Japanese (see Nodari 1994: 39, Rampillon 2000: 49).<sup>6</sup> Students who are



are able to discuss such matters in their target language probably already have achieved a rich set of learning strategies and some awareness of their learning process. Nevertheless, tasks that aim at the awareness of students' learning processes should, if possible, always be related to an explicit language skill (speaking, hearing, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary etc.) or content (topic, communication situation etc.) in the target language to avoid wasting students' time by exclusively learning how to learn without concretely applying it to improving one's skills in the target language (see Rampillon 2000: 47).

However, introducing learner autonomy has to be expected to be a slow and rather difficult process. Scharle and Szabó (2000: 9) divide it into three phases: 1. *Raising awareness*: Students get acquainted to the idea of learner autonomy, but most activities are still initiated and controlled by the teacher. 2. *Changing attitudes*: Abilities and ideas, acquired in the first phase are being applied and repeatedly practised. Learners develop a sense of responsibility and get more space for their own initiatives. 3. *Transferring roles*: Learners get more space for own decisions and take over responsibility and initiative that before was in the hands of the teacher. It is open to doubt however, that phase 3 can often be reached in language classes at an average Japanese university, but some success can be achieved for sure.

One way of raising awareness of students' learner type, socialization, learning strategies etc. is through questionnaires (see Bimmel/Rampillon 2000: 142 ff., Scharle/Szabó 2000: 16 ff., Rampillon 1994: 80 ff, just to mention a few.) but I shall not focus on these here.<sup>7</sup>

The first thing to do when intending to introduce autonomous learning in the lessons is to analyze the conditions of the class to be taught: How motivated do the students appear? How much time are they willing to invest in the class? What is their level? How many hours do you teach them a week and for how long? Is it your own class or is it team teaching? If so: is your colleague cooperative? Are they majors or general education students? Is it their first (English) or second foreign language?<sup>8</sup> Is it possible to create a space where students can meet outside the class hours and learn on their own? etc.

Autonomy does not mean that the students have to learn or work on their own. Pair and group work is as good a basis for learner autonomy as the individual and even more suitable in a Japanese context (see Aoki/Smith 1999: 22). I find that groups of four to six students are ideal for activities during and outside the class. As kind of a general procedure when solving tasks, I suggest short phases of talks in the groups, homework (encouraging students also to meet outside class) and discussion of the homework in the

groups in class. The problem is how to get feedback and intervene in the activities of the students, since spontaneous discussions in the plenum are rather difficult. Three procedures appear most practicable: 1. walking around in class and joining the groups for flexible interaction, 2. letting the students make small presentations in front of the class<sup>9</sup> and 3. asking them to hand in short written reports. The tasks should, as mentioned above, be connected to actual language learning activities and be followed by other tasks that arise from them. Flexibility on the side of the teacher is very important to give place for turns of activities that are initiated by the students. One difficult tight-rope to walk is how to define tasks so that they are not too detailed and prescriptive as this would undermine the idea of self-direction. Tasks should also not be so vague and complex so that they leave the students at a loss. It sounds like a paradox, but Japanese students' tendency to obey given rules can be used to implement routines that lead to more autonomy through reflection. "In our experience with Japanese university students, if the 'rules of engagement' are negotiated, many respond eagerly in a more active, self-directed manner." (Aoki/Smith 1999: 24)

Many tasks or activities that encourage learners to reflect and organize their learning process are possible. Even a very basic one that is also practicable with first year general education students<sup>10</sup> can illustrate some of the inherent problems that often arise and measures that can be taken to solve or avoid them.

*Merry-go-round of ideas (Ideenkarussell, Rampillon 2000: 68)*: Students are asked to think of skills that have to be practised when learning a foreign language. → The topic is discussed in the groups and the results (the items) are collected on the blackboard. This is normally no problem. The results would be for example: *hearing, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation*. → Everyone in the group takes an empty paper and writes one of the items at the top. Each one in the group takes a different item. → Then everyone writes down a detailed and concrete description of their favorite learning technique for the item on the paper and passes it on to their neighbour. → After four times every sheet of paper has four different learning strategies for practising the same language skill. → The students discuss these strategies in their groups.

That sounds rather simple but due to its intrinsic complexity can turn out to be a very difficult task for Japanese students who are not used to these kinds of activities. Depending on their performance it will have to be split into a number of smaller tasks, spread over several sessions and will have to be guided. It could, for example, turn out that most students might just want to write the same learning strategy, because they have never used a variety of learning techniques. Here preparation could be done as

homework: Students have to interview people they know about their learning techniques regarding a special language skill, until they have found a certain number of learning techniques. However, before this another preliminary task will probably be necessary. The students' statements on their learning techniques can be extremely short and cryptic, so that they do not really give an idea of what is actually meant. Just to name a few examples of students' descriptions of learning techniques aiming to remember new grammar patterns: "remember several German expressions", "read the textbook well", "understand".<sup>11</sup> Such statements of course are in their generality senseless, since they do not describe any concrete actions. Describing can be practised, for example, by giving written homework with a fixed number of lines. In the next lesson students explain their techniques to their partners who have to do exactly as instructed. The description is then understandable, when students' partners do exactly as their partner's would carry out their learning technique. The student who listens to the explanation has the task to ask if he does not exactly know what to do.

Having built a basis for the exchange of ideas for learning the more challenging and difficult, but also the most important part of discussing, comparing and evaluating them has to follow. The key to achieve this (which in my opinion is also the key to autonomous and self-directed learning itself) is learning to persistently ask questions. Encouragement to ask questions has not really been part of most Japanese students' educational history, which I think is the foremost reason for a very low profile in autonomous learning. Depending on how much time the teacher wants to spend on explicitly promoting autonomy and depending on the students' performance the teacher has to decide if he or she wants to guide the students to think about questions by themselves or if he or she wants to provide lists of questions. The former is extremely difficult and can take a lot of time the latter can end in the students' simply clinging to provided questions without reflecting them.

However, this could be a list of questions that basically should be asked about any task or exercise and which might guide students to a more active and self-directed attitude towards learning. The list can be given out as a guideline that students should be allowed and encouraged to modify:

- この練習の目的は何か？（何のためにこのように練習するのか？何を身につけることができるか？）
- What is the aim of this exercise? (Why am I doing it? What can I internalize/achieve by doing it?)
- 何を使うか・使えるか？（教材・メディアなど）なぜ？

→ What can/do I use? (materials, media etc.) And why?

- この練習で達成できないものは何か? (何が身につけられないか?)

What is it I cannot achieve/internalize with this exercise?

- このような練習の長所は、短所は?

→ What are the benefits and what are the drawbacks of this kind of exercise?

- この練習の前に何をするか? (その前の練習・準備)

→ What preliminary exercises could prepare me for this exercise?

- この練習が終わってから何をするか?

→ What further exercises could I design to consolidate or deepen what I have learned with this exercise?

The goal of this task (or this set of tasks) is:

- to recognize that there is a variety of learning styles and that one can try to find out and chose which one is the most suitable for oneself (awareness of one's own learner type)
- to understand that exercises, learning styles, materials and contents are not "God (teacher) given" but can be designed and looked for on one's own initiative, either as a group or as an individual
- to convey the idea of exchanging ideas and experiences about learning with others
- to learn to describe one's learning styles in order to exchange and analyze them
- to learn to reflect one's learning by systematically asking questions about it (creating options and making well-founded choices).
- to use this metacognitive knowledge about learning to systematically design, monitor and evaluate one's own learning strategies and to build up a personal learning style

Of course these little tasks should repeatedly be practised and included in classroom activities as routine sets that are used together with the learning of contents and language skills that have to be practised in class. They should be turned into automated but flexible and well-reflected routines

- that make students aware of the aim of tasks and exercises they find in their textbooks or that their teacher gives them
- that give them the ability to modify, complement, prepare, consolidate or abandon exercises for their own purposes

- that help them to design their own exercises and tasks. (Basically the same procedure can be applied for establishing routines of inferencing or induction too<sup>1 2</sup>)
- that help them to realize that it is more fun to create their own tasks and exercises individually or mutually with or for their peers, and to understand that designing exercises usually means to practise the contents and skills in question and by doing so already acquire the target learning skills to some extent

A further step could be to let learners plan short phases of the lessons and slowly take over some responsibility through learning by teaching or step by step increase complexity of tasks given in class or as homework. However, these steps must be slow, gradual and supervised. Activities for explicit reflection of the learning process should always be followed by more implicit activities. Ideas for learning techniques described in the above mentioned merry-go-round game could for example be tested, discussed and evaluated in the groups. They can be collected and systemized in a “learning how to learn corner” (*Lernecke zum Lernenlernen*, see Rampillon: 2000: 46) which could be a cardboard box system, a folder or a homepage that every learner is able to access. Based on this tool students can develop an index card system with self-designed exercises, categorized by language skills or topics. Everybody writes their names on the card they have designed and if someone finds mistakes, they have the task to contact the author of the card in order to correct it together (see Nodari 1994: 40)

Other activities for explicit reflections to promote learner autonomy, which only shall be briefly mentioned here, could for example be:

- giving students active orientation of their curriculum, for example by asking them to make a lesson journal (that can be modified and commented) with which the learners know, at which point of the curriculum they presently are (Nodari 1994: 39) or by letting them analyze the textbook, which is used in class (and maybe compare it to others).
- self-evaluation of students' learning (after the lesson, after a chapter in the textbook etc.)
- creating a common learning space by collecting materials and storing or displaying them in a designated area or room
- Highly motivated students can be given the task to explore the frontiers of the whole grammar of the target language, by analyzing the list of contents of an extensive grammar book in their own language. (This does not mean learning

the grammar per se, but to find some orientation of what there is to learn, where the learner is at the present point, and how the grammar is presented and organized by the author of the book.)

Task orientated activities and projects that *implicitly* promote self-directed learning are not discussed in this paper, but they are of vital importance and, combined with the above mentioned *explicit* activities, can lead to interesting, very motivating results and a high level of students' self-reflection on their activities.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am aware of the discourses on the application of methodology in different cultural contexts, stereotyped "Western" points of view on interdependence and collectivism, as well as of the fact, that generalization by nationality is basically inadmissible (see Usuki 2003, Brown 2003, Littlewood 1999, Boeckmann 2003, Aoki 1999 and 2003 etc.). But on the other hand in regard to learning styles and autonomy Japanese students, freshly out of high school, can be seen as a rather homogenous group with a relatively low number of exceptions. And promoting autonomy at itself cannot be dismissed as a "Western approach", which does not fit into the East Asian or Japanese context, since every learner should at least have the right to decide (and necessarily the ability to reflect), in which way he or she wants to learn. (see Benson 2000)

<sup>2</sup> At least for the third language (e.g., German) but also for English, there are only very few Japanese universities who really provide this.

In case 1 and 2 the students will most likely find to a more autonomous way of learning anyway.

<sup>3</sup> Which is especially striking and confusing for the students in the case of team teaching, when two teachers (often a Japanese and a non-Japanese) have to share one class and do not really communicate or adjust their teaching methods and contents. It is, for example, difficult to teach induction strategies, if one's team teaching partner explains all grammar in advance, without telling the other what exactly he has done in his classes. I also imagine students would tend to get rather confused and be pushed back into their passive high school classroom habits, if they have to switch between grammar translation and communicative lessons every week.

<sup>4</sup> This obviously cannot be expected in the near future and cannot be subject of this paper. Benson (2000: 116) gives four kinds of constraints of autonomy: *policy constraints* (e.g. which language can be learned and which not), *institutional constraints* (rules and regulations, certification, examination, curricula and social organization of school and classroom practices), *conceptions of language learning* (dominant ideological conceptions on what counts as 'learning a language') and *language teaching methodologies* (assumptions about how languages are learned). In the case of Japan, *institutional constraints* especially have to be abolished if the aim really is to acquire communicative competence in the target language. (see also Boeckmann 2003: 472)

<sup>5</sup> Keywords are for example "dependence – independence – interdependence" (Little 2000) or "proactive and reactive autonomy" (Littlewood 1999: 75 ff.)

<sup>6</sup> This actually suggests that especially Japanese teachers should involve themselves in this task, since due to their proficiency in Japanese, they can communicate the subject to the students with more facility than most of their foreign colleagues.

<sup>7</sup> Questionnaires mentioned here are for the self-awareness of the learner. In another context questionnaires can be very helpful especially in a Japanese context, because they can provide information

on critical views which students would not express directly. Letting students design questionnaires can be a cause for them to reflect or discuss their learning. Questionnaires for self-evaluation can also be found in some textbooks (e.g. the German textbook "Moment Mall") at the end of each chapter.

<sup>8</sup> In the case of a second foreign language as general education it is legitimate to ask how much sense it makes for the students to take for example one or two German lessons a week for one year, when most of the students do not continue to learn the language anyway and have not achieved an acceptable level in their *first* foreign language. Here I would even suggest to set autonomy as the main goal of the course and use the study of German rather to introduce and illustrate it, because those students who are really interested in learning the language will have to do the main effort outside the classroom anyway, and some insight into language learning will be of more help to them than to practice in class with a majority of rather uninterested peers.

<sup>9</sup> For the procedure of individual and group presentation see the very interesting paper of Mizuki (2003).

<sup>10</sup> With motivated students in smaller groups it is also possible to read an academic paper on language learning, such as for example Mary-Ann Reiss' "Helping the Unsuccessful Language Learner", which is rather short, very well structured and not too difficult for learners. Or in a shorter version a text given by Wenden (1991: 121), with the title: "A definition of a good language learner". Strategies described in these texts can be practised and illustrated by applying them on the reading and discussion of the text itself (requires rather high level and motivation from the students).

<sup>11</sup> Reiss (1983: 263) mentions *specificity* and *generality* of statements about learning techniques as a difference between successful and unsuccessful learners. It has to be said of course, that the quality of the statements varies. But in general the first reflex of Japanese students is to give as little output as possible in a classroom situation.

<sup>12</sup> Inferencing and induction of grammar patterns basically is a matter of asking questions in order to create options and chose from them too. E.g.: How can I formulate rules for word order or flexion of words? Can I relate them to patterns that I have learned before? How can I check my hypothesis? etc.

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