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# Gifts and Spaces: Metaphorical Conceptions of Learner and Teacher Autonomy

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## **Abstract**

The concept of 'autonomy' has become an established one in language education research. Many researchers now claim that greater degrees of learner autonomy can lead to better performance from students, and by the same token greater teacher autonomy enables language instructors to fulfil their professional potential. In this paper, the author investigates language teachers' relationships with the concepts of learner and teacher autonomy, and discusses methodological challenges in implementing metaphor-based research. An initial survey of language teachers working at Japanese universities (n = 55) was conducted to ascertain instructors beliefs regarding 'autonomy', and how (or if) such beliefs were reflected in their practice. Metaphors generated in this survey were probed further in semi-structured interviews (n = 14). The survey data reveals mismatches between self-reported beliefs and practice in connection with learner autonomy, with generally positive beliefs regarding learner autonomy not necessarily reflected in reporting on practice. Further analysis of the metaphor data collected through interviews suggests that language teachers see 'learner autonomy' and 'teacher autonomy' quite differently, with the former conceptualised as 'a gift', and the latter as 'a space'.

## **1. Defining Autonomy**

Over the last fifty years the body of literature researching learner autonomy has grown significantly, and now it is fair to say the concept (or concepts) have become well-established in the field of language education. Holec's (1981)

definition of autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (1981, p. 3) is simple but elegant, encompassing both the capacity of the learner and opportunities afforded by learning environments. Subsequent definitions have clarified and broadened our understanding of autonomy; Little (1991) contends that autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making, and independent action, but also autonomous learners’ implicit freedom from control. This is not to say that autonomous means alone; Dam emphasises the social nature of (language) learning in her assertion that the autonomous learner shows “willingness to act independently *and* in cooperation with others, as a social, responsible person” (1995, p. 1). These researchers, and others, acknowledge the multi-faceted essence of autonomy, but the existence of various ideological frameworks for understanding the concept still create challenges for the teacher / teacher-researcher attempting to implement autonomous practices in their context.

Consequently, efforts have been made to develop robust frameworks for both theoretical conceptualisation and practical implementation of learner autonomy. In one such model, Oxford (2003) outlined a systematised categorisation of existing theories, suggesting four dominant perspectives;

1. Technical (focus on the physical situation)
  2. Psychological (focus on the characteristics of learners)
  3. Socio-cultural (focus on mediated learning)
  4. Political-critical (focus on ideologies, access and power structures)
- (Oxford, 2003; pp. 76–80)

Oxford (2015) later honed in on the characteristics of the autonomous learner, with a deeper description of the psychological perspective (self-regulated, emotionally intelligent, resilient, psychologically engaged, self-determined, existentially free, and effective) and the sociocultural perspective (mediated, cognitively apprenticed, socioculturally strategic, invested, sociopolitically free, and self-efficacious). Another sophisticated description of autonomy is the model developed by Benson (2001; 2011), which recognises three broad, and interdependent, dimensions of autonomy in language

learning; psychology of learning, learning behaviour, and learning situations. Within this framework, too, Benson is keen to acknowledge the variability of autonomy, not just across dimensions, but within and around learners on a sliding scale of degrees, and changeable over time (2011; p. 65). It is also important to understand that language learning takes place in a variety of circumstances and contexts including, but certainly not restricted to, formalised classroom education. A learner may use an application on their smartphone, create opportunities to use their target language in social settings, draw up a personal study plan, or keep a notebook of new vocabulary as they encounter it. Each of these actions demonstrates the learners capacity to exercise a dimension of their own autonomy at a given moment. A multi-dimensional understanding of autonomy accepts that the innate character of a learner may tend towards autonomy, but also that training and guidance can support learners to take on autonomous behaviour, and institutional or cultural factors may inhibit or encourage autonomy.

In comparison to learner autonomy, teacher autonomy as a concept is far less prevalent in the literature, at least directly. The movement in educational research has been away from strict methodological training of teachers (in the expectation that good teaching relies on the application of particular techniques), towards a reconceptualisation of teachers as self-directed facilitators. The reality may be somewhat different, of course, and critics point out that teachers may be constrained by factors (such as national curricula or institutional regulations) beyond their control (Barfield et al., 2002; Viera, 2003). Degrees of professional freedom clearly impact upon a teacher's capacity to exercise his or her own autonomy - teachers, like their students, need to manage their own development while working within the space which they are afforded.

Both teacher and learner autonomy are desirable, for both practical and idealistic reasons (Smith & Erdogan, 2008). In practice, large swathes of research conclude that some degree (or form) of autonomy leads to higher levels of motivation and greater efficiency for both teachers and learners (see Dickinson, 1995 and Chong & Reinders, 2022 for extensive literature reviews). In a broader sense, autonomy as a philosophy promotes and develops positive values, such as critical thinking, self-determination, responsibility, emotional

intelligence and resilience, that most would consider beneficial in progressive societies. Given, then, that autonomy in language education is desirable, my research questions are as follows.

1. What are language teachers' beliefs regarding learner and teacher autonomy?
2. What are the conditions which support or hinder learner and teacher autonomy?

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Survey**

A survey was constructed modelled on existing instruments, with the intention of assessing teachers' self-reported beliefs and practices regarding autonomy. To assess learners' capacity for autonomy, Murase (2015) drew on the work of Benson (2011) and Oxford (2003) to create a 113 item Likert scale survey, the Measuring Instrument for Language Learner Autonomy (MILLA). The instrument is designed to analyse learners' self-reported capacity for autonomy across four dimensions - technical, psychological, socio-cultural, and political-philosophical - as well as the interactions between them. Table 1 outlines how autonomy is defined within this model.

Borg and Al-Busaidi (2012) followed a similar approach, at least initially, in investigating the beliefs and practices of teachers in Saudi Arabia in regard to learner autonomy. The survey was comprised of a set of 37 Likert-scale items, initially constructed around different perspectives of learner autonomy, a further set of scales to determine the participants attitudes towards the desirability and feasibility of autonomy in their contexts, and open ended questions about how autonomous respondents believed their students to be and how autonomy was promoted in their institutions. This study, and a subsequent connected study (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017), suggested a significant gap between how desirable and how feasible teachers felt autonomy to be. The gap reflects tensions between what is considered ideal and what is thought to be practical, and the internal struggle within each teacher as he or she works out such conflicting concepts as "beliefs about the value of learner

autonomy vs. beliefs about what students are able to do” (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2017; p. 22).

Informed by these instruments, I designed a survey for this study to assess;

- 1) how language instructors in Japanese universities conceptualise ‘Learner Autonomy’
- 2) how feasible / desirable ‘Learner Autonomy’ is in their working context

*Table 1: Dimensions of Learner Autonomy*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example Statement</b>
<b>Technical</b>	The capacity to set goals, plan learning and study independently. Understanding of learning methods and resources.	I set achievable goals in learning English.
<b>Psychological</b>	The capacity to control / manage motivational and affective factors.	If I worry about learning English, I know how I can cope with it.
<b>Political-philosophical</b>	A learner’s attitudes towards authority and hierarchy.	Students should always follow their teacher’s instructions.
<b>Socio-cultural</b>	A learner’s orientation towards other learners and cultural differences in learning	If I am doing something different from other students, I feel worried.

To address the first, participants were asked to complete the open ended question ‘Briefly, what does learner autonomy mean to you?’. Next, respondents indicated their level of agreement (on a five point Likert scale) with thirty-eight statements connected to learner autonomy across four dimensions. Then, two sets of fourteen statements on a four point likert scale were used to ascertain participants beliefs regarding the desire-ability and feasibility of autonomous practice in their own institutions, and the survey closed with a combination of likert and open-ended questions about support for / obstruction to the implementation of teacher and learner autonomy in

their working context. The full survey can be found in the appendix.

## 2.2 Interviews

Fourteen of the survey respondents agreed to be interviewed. Each of the semi-structured interviews was recorded and transcribed.

## 2.3 Metaphor Analysis

Research into teacher cognition, beliefs and identity has grown in importance in recent years, with the recognition that good teaching is not solely a question of technique or product, but driven by the ‘inner lives’ of teachers (Borg, 2006). However, squaring reported beliefs with what people actually do is a challenge for researchers (Borg, 2003). One method which seeks to address this is metaphor analysis.

In conceptual metaphor, the source domain is used to describe the target domain via a network of mappings. For example, the commonly used conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A JOURNEY can be further divided into a collection of elements, mapped between the concrete and abstract.

Source: JOURNEY	Target: LOVE
the travellers	the lovers
the vehicle	the love relationship itself
the journey	events in the relationship
the distance covered	the progress made
the obstacles encountered	the difficulties experienced
decisions about which way to go	choices about what to do
the destination of the journey	the goal(s) of the relationship

(Kovecses, 2010, p. 9)

Conceptual metaphor is understood to both express and shape human thought at a fundamental level (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kovecses, 2010). In this way, metaphor analysis sits in the same ontological basket as other qualitative research methods in education, which attempt to “tap into such things in the belief that the mere description of effective teaching is partial.

We need to explain good teaching - to uncover the reasons that motivate and sustain it” (Breen, 1991; p. 213). Metaphor can be used to unlock or uncover the implicit or even unconscious beliefs of the teacher.

Methodologically, there are two main techniques utilised to gather metaphor as data. The first is to elicit metaphors, usually by asking participants to complete a stem (orally, or in writing). Common practice is to ask for a brief explanation, known as an entailment, to identify which values are being mapped from source to target and allow for more accurate interpretation. For example, the elicited metaphor ‘*A teacher is a parent*’ may refer to loving, indulgent and nurturing values, or strict and controlling ones, depending on the participant’s understanding of the concept and values of the source ‘*parent*’. By adding ‘*because...*’ to the stem, researchers hope (to some extent) to clarify a participant’s meaning.

Other researchers look for emergent metaphors within written sources (such as journals or essays) or oral sources (like interviews). One oft-cited example of this approach is a paper by Oxford et al. (1998), in which a broad range of teacher-written narratives (journals, articles, interviews and so on) were scanned for metaphors for education and associated concepts.

Once metaphor data is collected, the researcher has further decisions to make regarding analysis. One method is the constant comparative method, an inductive method which identifies emergent themes from open coding and categorisation of metaphors (see de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002 and Su & Yang, 2020 for examples). A second commonly used technique is pre-determined categorisation, in which metaphors are classified according to groupings developed by researchers before the coding process, or adopted from existing studies.

In this study, both elicited and emergent methods were considered. As part of the survey, participants were asked to complete the following four stems.

1. *What is your metaphor for ‘a language teacher’?*  
*A language teacher is like ... because...*
2. *What is your metaphor for ‘a language learner’?*  
*A language learner is like ... because...*

3. *What is your metaphor for 'a language classroom'?*

*A language classroom is like ... because....*

4. *What is your metaphor for 'language learning'?*

*Language learning is like ... because....*

The images generated were used as prompts in the semi-structured interviews, with interviewees asked to select images they found more or less resonant with their own perspectives on language education. In addition, the transcripts were analysed for emergent metaphors, and patterns of metaphors. However, as I will discuss later in this paper, the collection and analysis of metaphor was not without problems.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Survey

There were fifty responses to the question “Briefly, what does learner autonomy mean to you?”, on which a keyword analysis was performed (see Table 2, below). As participants were explicitly asked to be brief in their responses, it is implicitly understood that these definitions do not fully express each participant’s understanding of learner autonomy. However, we can ascertain which perspectives or domains are prioritised by the instructors in this study.

The keyword analysis indicates that respondents prioritise the technical and psychological domains, with a high degree of cross-reference, bearing out Murase’s contention that domains do not operate independently. Looking beyond the keywords to a deeper reading, survey responses tended to reference both technical and psychological keywords in very similar ways.

This was not the case for references to political-philosophical and socio-cultural domains. In the case of the political philosophical domain, there were differences in how instructors conceptualise the hierarchical power relationship between teacher and learner.

Honing in on the keyword ‘freedom’, these examples are indicative of different perspectives on how it is to be allocated.

*“... to be allowed the freedom to make choices that are best for them.”*



*“... learner has the freedom to choose the method of learning and content being learned.”*

Are freedom / power / control in the gift of the teacher, to be ‘allowed’? Or are they taken or held by the learner, as a fundamental right? These are questions we will return to with the metaphor analysis.

With a better understanding of how language teachers conceptualise learner autonomy, the remainder of the survey indicated several further trends.

**Table 2: “Briefly, what does learner autonomy mean to you?”**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Keywords</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
<b>Technical</b>	goal-setting resources tools strategies	58%
<b>Psychological</b>	motivation will confidence attitude	42%
<b>Political-philosophical</b>	negotiate control power ownership freedom	34%
<b>Socio-cultural</b>	peers alone others collaborative	14%

Firstly, teachers profess a desire to foster autonomy, but in practice seem less inclined to do so. In the first section of the survey, when presented with more abstract statements about autonomy, teachers reported strong support for student choice of learning methods (94.23%), involvement in decisions about what to learn (86.54%), peer assessment (71.15%) and even (to a lesser

extent) negotiated syllabi (25%). However, when asked about the desirability of initiating such practices with their *own* learners, support was less enthusiastic. While 61.38% found it desirable for learners to be involved in decisions regarding what materials to use, only 53.84% felt that learner involvement in the selection on teaching methods was desirable, and just 50% felt this way about negotiating assessment methods or the objectives of a course.

Most likely, these responses are connected to perceptions of motivation and proficiency. Respondents reported that both motivation and proficiency correlated to learners' capacity for autonomous behaviour, and that lack of motivation and proficiency presented the greatest obstacles to the successful implementation of autonomous practices at their institution. Motivation in particular seemed to be a key issue. Although 70.59% claimed that 'In general, my students are proficient enough to learn autonomously', and 62.74% agreed that 'The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy' just 49% of participants agreed with the statement 'In general, my students are sufficiently motivated enough to learn autonomously'.

Teachers also believe that they have an important role to play in Learner Autonomy. Although independent study and self-determination were considered important aspects of autonomy, only 7.69% agreed that 'Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher'. As for the teacher's role, 65.39% agreed that 'Language Learners need skills training to develop autonomy' and 73.07% stated that 'Where possible, I help students set and adjust goals'.

### 3.2 Survey: Elicited Metaphors

"Matching metaphors to educational theories is not unproblematic ... the fact that you say (metaphoric) "xxx", does not necessarily mean that you believe or practice what the metaphor implies."

(Low, 2015; p. 33)

This quote neatly summarises the challenge researchers face in attaching significance to elicited metaphor, and here I have to admit that there are limitations to any claims I might make based purely on the data collected in this section of the survey. Although the intention was not to collect metaphor data in the survey for analysis itself, but to find common metaphors to use as

prompts in subsequent interviews, the elicited metaphor responses serve to highlight some of the issues facing researchers employing this particular technique.

One issue is that, in being asked to provide multiple metaphors and entailments, many participants provided either mixed or conflicting metaphors. For example, consider the following responses.

**Table 3: Survey - Elicited Metaphors**

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>A teacher is...</b>	<b>A learner is...</b>	<b>A classroom is...</b>	<b>Language Learning is...</b>
<b>8</b>	<i>a gardener who plants seeds and helps the plants to grow</i>	<i>A traveller in a journey experiencing ups and downs, pleasure and pain, and a goal that might be quite distant</i>	<i>A cage - It can hold people back, constrain them, make them passive</i>	<i>a long, long journey. If you travel independently, it is more rewarding than a package holiday or obligatory school trip.</i>
<b>46</b>	<i>therapist - they find out what treatment is necessary and give it</i>	<i>A cyclist - They have to provide the power to progress and steer them self to where they want to go</i>	<i>a prison - there are usually too many sentences in there</i>	<i>An exploration of self</i>

In the case of respondent 46, the elicited metaphors and entailments for ‘learner’ and ‘language learning’ (traveller / journey) are conceptually linked, but neither the metaphor for ‘teacher’, nor the metaphor for ‘classroom’ can be connected.

Respondent 46 demonstrates further challenges for the researcher. Firstly, it appears that the elicited metaphor for ‘language learning’ is not actually a metaphor. The over- or mis-identification of metaphor can be problematic,

although the use of a robust metaphor identification procedure such as Cameron & Maslen's Discourse Dynamics instrument (2010) may address that. In this instance, 46's response to the survey item should be marked as incomplete. The second problem highlighted by 46's response is the metaphor elicited for 'classroom'. Although at first glance the metaphor 'a classroom is a prison' appears to sit in the same category as 'a classroom is a cage' (as suggested by respondent 8), looking at the entailment we can see that 46 is just making a pun. Jokey responses were not uncommon in this survey ("language learning is like a needle - it's long and a pain in the ass"), but these responses must be disregarded.

The mixing of metaphors across elicitations is perhaps representative of the complex and multi-faceted nature of teacher beliefs, and could be considered a strength of the data. Unfortunately, in this particular study the number of user responses was too small and the number of categories too broad to engage in meaningful quantitative analysis, and the detail contained in the entailments too limited to address in qualitative analysis. However, the metaphors did serve their intended purpose within the research plan by providing authentic prompts for the interviews.

### **3.3 Interviews: Elicited Metaphors**

The most commonly cited metaphors from the survey stage were selected and, via Google Image search, appropriate visual representations chosen and printed on large sheets of paper to serve as prompts for interviewees. While in some ways this method achieved the goal of reducing leading prompts from the interviewer, it appeared that interviewees were drawn to particular images for compelling reasons other than those intended. A powerful example is this comment by 'Patrick' (all interviewees have been given pseudonyms).

*It's also a, a teacher's job to be in some sense a leader ... when I look at the, the conductor. But that might be just because my background is a conductor. I was originally a music teacher and I directed string orchestras.*  
(Patrick, Interview)

It seems inevitable that someone who has performed as a conductor would

be drawn to that image and construct a metaphor around it. In turn, the metaphor of ‘the classroom is a dojo’ becomes compelling to a participant who practices martial arts, and ‘language learning is a marathon’ is attractive to an interviewee who regularly runs.

This interviewee highlighted another issue with the selection of the images.

*Maybe there’s a kind of gender thing as well. I’m picking the girly ones, aren’t I?  
(Annie, Interview)*

The participant who sees themselves in an image may be subconsciously drawn to that image. Gender, ethnicity and age (as represented in the selected images) are also important to consider when deciding on pictures for this kind of research.

The following three responses indicate how important entailments are in elicited metaphor research, demonstrating how different people map entirely different values from source to target. Each of these interviewees was commenting on an image of a child standing alone in a forest. The child’s back was to the camera, so it was not possible to see their facial expression.

*I’ll start with my own learners. I mean these ones not necessarily in a particularly positive way, but I feel like a lot of my learners, it’s kind of meandering around aimlessly without much focus or direction a lot of the time. Um, it’s like a child lost in the woods. Yeah, yeah, exactly.  
(Jason, interview)*

*Finding your own path through the forest maybe as a nice idea. There’s a lot of trees that could stop you up or get you caught up, but you just have to figure out how to get around it and find your way and everyone might have a different path to get through it, but that doesn’t matter. And finding what fits you best.  
(Barbara, interview)*

*And I feel like, you know, the learner is going through this very kind of treacherous forest and I also like in a way, I guess it would be kinda nice if yet another person with them. I don’t think learning has to be necessarily an individual thing. It*

*shouldn't be an individual thing.*  
(Melvin, interview)

Each of the interviewees is prioritising or highlighting different values of the source (a child walking in the woods) to map across in their metaphor. Such differing interpretations of the same metaphor are important to note and suggest that elicited metaphor needs to be handled very carefully.

### 3.3 Interviews: Emergent Metaphors

After considering the elicited metaphors and their entailments, I went through the transcripts to uncover emergent metaphors. A great many ideas are expressed through conceptual metaphor, and the metaphor which is selected can reveal underlying perspectives. Conceptual metaphor theories suggest that metaphor both expresses and shapes our understanding of the world around us - as Lakoff puts it, "We commonly take our conceptual metaphors as reality, and live according to them." (2008, p. 25). Research in this field has led to the concept of 'embodied metaphor' (e.g. Gibbs, 2008), which posits that metaphors are "motivated and rooted in the structure of perceptual experiences and sensory systems." (Cacciari, 2008; p. 426). The metaphorical structures which emerged from the interviews in this study consistently pointed to differing conceptions of teacher and learner autonomy.

### LEARNER AUTONOMY IS A GIFT

Learner autonomy was spoken of almost entirely in terms of 'an object to be given'. These quotes are typical, and similar conceptual metaphors were used by every interviewee.

*I've found that if I **offer** students a bit of a say ... they actually respect me less if I **give** them too much input.*  
(Jeff, interview)

*... the teacher is responsible for **giving** the students these opportunities, but also **giving** them guidance and things. ... you can **push** everything at a student and they just don't **pick it up**.*

*(Robert, interview)*

*I think teachers generally **hand over** any responsibility to the students in that situation ... I know that I've certainly not **given** them much choice.*

*(Jason, interview)*

This suggests that teachers still see their role as pivotal, and that ultimately they are in control of learner activity. One interviewee explicitly referred to the concept of control, when describing a class film-making project.

*... we always wanted, like, let's **give them ownership** of the scripts and we tried different ways ... and then we get the red pen out and we'd start crossing out ... the teachers **take control** and I think that was a problem. (Later, when) they went on site to start filming ... we kind of **lost control**.*

*(Melvin, interview)*

Here, the interviewee acknowledges that the teachers should not take control, but later laments an occasion in which they lost control. What is most pertinent is that he sees 'control' as something within the teacher's ownership, to be given, taken, or lost.

## **TEACHER AUTONOMY IS A PHYSICAL SPACE**

Both teacher and learner are present in the metaphor LEARNER AUTONOMY IS A GIFT, as giver and receiver, and no example occurred within the interview data without both. However, teacher autonomy appears to be perceived differently by the participants, not as an object, but as a physical space within which the teacher can move. In some of the metaphors which emerged there was explicit mention of an agent setting the parameters for that space (e.g. an institution, a curriculum), but certainly not in every instance.

*I think it's as much my responsibility to check out what my **boundaries** are and what we can create **within** them ... and, you know, you **go around** the system sometimes.*

*(Harriet, interview)*

This interviewee feels that the space is somewhat negotiable, and she is obliged to test its limits. Although the space is controlled by others ('the system'), there is a belief that within that space she has freedom, and that the boundaries are not clearly set. This quote reflects the greater sense of self-agency expressed by many of the participants.

However, others felt far more restricted by circumstances.

*Certainly the curriculum is **stifling** for the required classes.*  
(Patrick, interview)

*I think having the unified curriculum could be **stifling** in some ways.*  
(Niles, interview)

Each of the interviewees were afforded greater or lesser freedom through such factors as seniority, contract conditions, or the nature of their institution's curriculum. This affected the kind of space which they described - restricted or open - but not the fact that they framed their ideas as 'TEACHER AUTONOMY IS A PHYSICAL SPACE'.

*Q: Are you **given** much freedom by the institutions?*

*A: ... there was **no room, no wiggle room** at all.*

*(Jason, interview)*

In this instance, even when the interviewer couched the question in terms of the 'gift' metaphor, the interviewee turned it back towards the idea of 'space'.

#### 4. Discussion & Conclusion

Combined data from both the survey and the interviews suggests that, whilst teachers see learner autonomy as desirable, they lack belief in their own learners to achieve autonomy. Teachers prioritise the teachable skills of technical autonomy (tools, strategies, goal-setting) over other, less quantifiable, forms of autonomy such as motivation and negotiation. This concept of learner autonomy centres the teacher in the learning process, and squares with the



metaphor 'LEARNER AUTONOMY IS A GIFT', and a gift which the teacher may hold back, give, or take back.

Aside from the students lack of motivation / proficiency, the biggest hindrance to the implementation of learner autonomy reported by participants was a coordinated curriculum. Again, the survey data matched to the emergent metaphors from the interview data in which teachers repeatedly conceptualised teacher autonomy as 'TEACHER AUTONOMY IS A PHYSICAL SPACE', either in curious investigation or suffocating restriction. Something for administrators to note.

The connections between motivation, proficiency and autonomy have been researched extensively elsewhere, but for those who take an interest in learner autonomy and wish to promote it, I suggest that a re-framing of conceptual metaphor may be an avenue to be explored. Researchers may also consider metaphor analysis as a useful tool in their future studies.

### Note

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## Appendix 1

### The Questionnaire

This survey should take between twenty and thirty minutes to complete, depending on how much detail you wish to provide.

### Online Consent Form

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to participate, you may close this page and not participate. The purpose of this survey is to examine the personal and institutional factors which affect how language teachers foster autonomous practices in their learners. If you are an instructor in a Japanese university, I welcome your participation. You will be asked to respond to a number of items related to your classroom practice and beliefs about language learning. You will also be asked a few questions to help establish demographic trends, but these questions will not make you individually identifiable. Your responses will be anonymous, and we do not anticipate any physical or mental impact or pain, or risks involved. If you feel at risk or uncomfortable at any time, you may terminate the survey immediately. You may choose to skip any question or withdraw your answers any time until you submit the questionnaire. Since your data will be fully anonymous, it will be impossible for the researchers to identify and delete it once you submit the questionnaire. Data will be held securely within the questionnaire system until transferred to the researchers. After ten years, the data will be deleted.

Do you understand this and agree to participate? If so, please click on “Yes” and continue to the questionnaire. If not, please click on “No” and withdraw

Thank you,

Darren Elliott, Nanzan University

\*1. I understand and agree to participate.

Yes      No

## I Eligibility

This research project focuses on the perceptions and practices of foreign

language teachers at Japanese universities. This includes teachers of English or other languages to Japanese speakers, or teachers of Japanese to non-Japanese speaking learners.

\*2. I teach languages at a Japanese university.

Yes      No

## II Languages Taught

\*3. What language(s) do you teach to speakers of other languages?

English    French      German    Spanish    Chinese    Indonesian  
Korean    Japanese    Other (please specify)

## III Metaphors for Language Education

Metaphors are a kind of figurative language, describing one thing or idea in terms of another (*“My brother is a pig, because his table manners are disgusting”*). A simple kind of metaphor is called a simile, in which the comparison is more direct (*“Time is like a river, because it flows”*).

In this part of the survey, I would like to know your metaphors for language education. Please complete the following sentences with your own ideas.

1. What is your metaphor for ‘a language teacher’?

A language teacher is like ... because....

2. What is your metaphor for ‘a language learner’?

A language learner is like ... because....

3. What is your metaphor for ‘a language classroom’?

A language classroom is like ... because....

4. What is your metaphor for ‘language learning’?

Language learning is like ... because....

## IV Defining Learner Autonomy

Briefly, what does learner autonomy mean to you?

## V Beliefs and Practice

Please give your opinion about the statements below.

*Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree*

1. Language learners of all ages can develop learner autonomy.
2. Learner autonomy is a realistic goal for all language learners, regardless of target language proficiency.
3. Learner autonomy is a realistic goal for all language learners, regardless of motivation levels.
4. Learner autonomy can be achieved by language learners of all cultural backgrounds.
5. Learner autonomy is a concept which is suited to Japanese learners.
6. The proficiency of a language learner does not affect their ability to develop autonomy.
7. It is possible to promote learner autonomy with both young language learners and adults.
8. Learners who lack confidence can still be autonomous learners
9. Language learners with a low level of proficiency can achieve learner autonomy.
10. The ability to set goals is an important aspect of autonomy
11. Students should understand the purpose and benefit of each class activity
12. Where possible, I help students set and adjust goals
13. Students should know how to find and assess materials for language learning
14. Learning how to learn is key to developing learner autonomy.
15. The ability to monitor one's own learning is central to learner autonomy.
16. To become autonomous, learners need to develop the ability to evaluate their own learning.
17. Learner autonomy requires varied and regular reflection
18. Language Learners need skills training to develop autonomy
19. Learner autonomy is promoted through regular opportunities for learners to complete tasks alone.
20. Independent study in the library is an activity which develops learner autonomy.

21. Autonomy can develop most effectively through learning outside the classroom.
22. Learner autonomy means learning without a teacher.
23. Learner autonomy is promoted through activities which give learners opportunities to learn from each other.
24. Learner autonomy is promoted by activities that encourage learners to work together.
25. Learner-centred classrooms provide ideal conditions for developing learner autonomy.
26. Learning to work alone is central to the development of learner autonomy.
27. Out-of-class tasks which require learners to use the internet promote learner autonomy.
28. Learner autonomy is promoted by independent work in a self-access centre.
29. Autonomy means that learners can make choices about how they learn.
30. Involving learners in decisions about what to learn promotes learner autonomy.
31. Learner autonomy cannot be promoted in teacher-centred classrooms.
32. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners have some choice in the kinds of activities they do.
33. Learner autonomy implies a rejection of traditional teacher-led ways of teaching.
34. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners are free to decide how their work will be assessed.
35. Learner autonomy requires the learner to be totally independent of the teacher.
36. Learner autonomy is promoted when learners can choose their own learning materials.
37. In order to achieve autonomy, the teacher and students should negotiate the syllabus
38. Self-assessment and peer-assessment promote autonomous learning

## **VI/VII Desirability / Feasibility of Learner Autonomy**

In your teaching context, how desirable / feasible is it for learners to be

involved in decisions about the following?

*Undesirable Slightly Undesirable Quite Desirable Very Desirable*

*Unfeasible Slightly feasible Feasible Very feasible*

1. The objectives of a course.
2. The materials used.
3. The kinds of tasks and activities they do.
4. The topics discussed.
5. How learning is assessed.
6. The teaching methods used.
7. Classroom management.

In your teaching context, how desirable / feasible is it for learners to be able to do the following?

1. Identify their own needs.
2. Identify their own strengths.
3. Identify their own weaknesses.
4. Monitor their own progress.
5. Evaluate their own learning.
6. Learn co-operatively. Learn independently.

## **VIII Support and Obstruction**

Considering your current place(s) of employment, to what degree to you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*Strongly Disagree Disagree Unsure Agree Strongly Agree*

1. In general, my students are not proficient enough to learn autonomously.
2. In general, my students are not motivated enough to learn autonomously.
3. Institutional requirements prevent me from developing learner autonomy.
4. Curriculum requirements prevent me from developing learner autonomy.
5. I am not given sufficient autonomy as a teacher.

Please elaborate on your answers.

Considering your current place(s) of employment, to what degree to you



agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. In general, my students are proficient enough to learn autonomously.
2. In general, my students are sufficiently motivated enough to learn autonomously.
3. My institution supports me in my efforts to develop learner autonomy.
4. Curriculum requirements allow me to develop learner autonomy.
5. I am given sufficient autonomy as a teacher.

Please elaborate on your answers.

## **IX Demographic Data**

How do you identify yourself?

Female   Male   Transgender   Prefer not to say   Other (please specify)

Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?

Full-time, contract

Full-time, permanent

Part-time (only) at one or more university

Retired

Other (please specify)

How long have you been teaching languages at Japanese universities?

1–5 years   6–10 years   11–15 years   16–20 years   21 years or longer