**Curtain CALL: Online Performances for Integrative Motivation**

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**Introduction**

*Curtain CALL* alludes to breaking out of earlier iterations of CALL where foreign language activities were confined to the computer classroom, unveiling a new dimension where students can address a global audience, the process and online products of which are hypothesized to enhance their integrative motivation. For all the ways that the concept of performance has been employed in theoretical and applied linguistics (cf., e.g., Austin, 1976, p. 6; Bourdieu, 1991, p. 122), this research is about prepared, formal performances by EFL students that can be preserved on the open Web. Online performances turn content from student presentations, EFL contests and other planned events into new media such as podcasts, online video and narrated slide shows.

The content-based EFL curriculum at Osaka Jogakuin College (OJC), designated a good practice by Japan’s education ministry (MEXT), with iPods loaded with listening materials in the hands of all students since early 2004, was detailed in McCarty (2005; 2007). A paper based on part of this presentation describes four kinds of OJC campus EFL contests, some presentations of which have been turned into podcasts. It analyzes various ways in which formal performances can motivate students toward excellence, defining instrumental and integrative motivation (McCarty, 2008). The presentation also analyzed the nature of student performances, but in this limited space the focus is on a Computer Communication course and an interview with a student in that class. Also through multidisciplinary frameworks including online education, this paper aims to provide directions for further CALL research on performances, EFL motivation, and the relation between the two.

**Theoretical and Pedagogical Considerations**

As authentic EFL performances preserved online are the target of this research, drama and performance studies would need bridges to EFL and Web 2.0. Howard (2002) does apply locus of control in performance studies to e-learning in the field of communication. Imoto suggests that “through creating another ‘self’ in the act of performance you can overcome culturally embodied inhibitions towards a foreign language” (2008). Williams and Burden similarly observe that learners can “experience new identities as authors, narrators, interpreters and critics through their second language” (1997, p. 22). Cummins calls for maximizing both cognitive engagement and identity investment, with positive results for L2 learner identity. “The products of students’ creative work or performances carried out within this pedagogical space are termed identity texts” (cited in Norton, 2008). Benefits of identity texts include allowing learners to “[e]xplore multiple identities”
and to “[i]nvest in imagined futures” (Norton, 2008). Online performances are clearly such products, which may correlate with integrative motivation.

Another approach is from the online education side, where the imperatives of autonomous and interactive learning have led to encouraging student-generated content. Sener finds “a solid theoretical and practical foundation " from the "wide variety of theories and contexts where it is used, for example Assessment for Learning, Authentic Task Design, problem-based learning, project-based learning, constructivism, and experiential education" (n.d.). Sener links student-generated content to greater student engagement in the learning process, a larger audience, valuing of students’ work, lasting products, and locus of control moving toward the learner.

Lee and McLoughlin find pedagogical value in facilitating “a learning experience in which the students are empowered to create their own content, thinking skills, and fostering a sense of community, while also resulting in products of lasting value to students individually, to peers ... and society” (2007). Osaka Jogakuin College “[s]tudents contribute to the professor's bilingual podcast feed and blog - targeted to those studying Japanese or English as a second language - by being interviewed by their professor, performing roles, or presenting their own creations” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008, Exhibit 3). This work is regarded as an exemplar of pedagogy 2.0: “[c]ross-cultural collaborative work using student-generated content” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007). The Sloan Consortium for online education designated it an “effective practice” (n.d.). Articles also cite the author’s rationale that student content creators become “part of the target language community, not just passive recipients or spectators of a foreign culture, which benefits their motivation and development of a bilingual identity” (Lee & McLoughlin, 2007).

Computer Communication class activities

Computer Communication, a one-semester elective course for OJC students in the two-year division, demonstrates content-based activities that may be motivating in themselves or turned into online performances for enhanced integrative motivation. An online base is first established by registering the class members in the WebCT learning management system (LMS). Activities utilize the WebCT asynchronous Discussion Board, synchronous Chat, and particularly the Student Homepage function, with photos e-mailed from their mobile phones, self-introductions, and links to sites they like for independent EFL study.

Web 2.0 activities that have been utilized in class include:

Posts to students’ campus blogs in English recognized as an alternative to writing in the LMS.

Yackpack: used as a group voice discussion board where students can first write an outline of their message <http://www.yackpack.com>. 
Students listen with earphones to podcasts they select from recommended sites.

My Pop Studio: students design their own avatar, mash-up music videos and reality TV shows; it also familiarizes them with online video editing techniques <http://www.mypopstudio.com>.

Students watch curriculum-related online videos, e.g., about human rights, and a tutorial on video camera techniques <http://www.witness.org>.

Students experience using a video camera in class and make a video for YouTube <http://www.youtube.com>.

A Voicethread narrated slide show of a student’s home region was recognized as her semester presentation project <http://www.voicethread.com>.

Colleagues have joined in from their offices through written or voice communication tools to simulate distance education. E-mail and the Mixi social networking service have been used for communication with students outside of class. After a student in the class was interviewed for this research (next section), she could be reached after graduation only via Mixi to confirm the accuracy of the author’s transcript.

Student Interview on Performances and Motivation

In the Fall 2007-2008 semester, one second-year student enrolled in the Computer Communication class (thus self-selected). As content-based EFL, it seemed ethically justifiable to interview her twice in class with her written permission on a standard human subject research form in Japanese. Her answers were transcribed, with quotations later confirmed as her exact meaning and not led by the author. This was a qualitative pilot exploration of relations between performances and EFL motivation.

Asked about her performances this semester, on campus she played bells at a special event and regularly played the organ behind the scenes (“It is not much different that I am not seen, since I think everyone notices a mistake.”) She included the online presentation with Voicethread (previous section) and five more graded in-class presentations.

Reflecting on performances: “Even if I could not do well, if I could make a clear main point to the audience, prepare, research the topic, and manage time, then I felt satisfied afterwards … I felt pressure, then relief … Pressure was from friends or members of the performing group, the audience, and the teacher, especially when it was graded. The audience creates good tension.”

Who was she performing for? “It was more importantly for myself.”

Reflecting on motivation: “I have the motivation to prepare, to do my best for the audience. When my friends perform well, I want to speak as well. Maybe performances motivate me to master English … For school presentations English is more of a tool.”
“In high school when my family hosted a home stay from a sister school, I was strongly motivated to communicate in English ... I like a TV program where Japanese people live abroad and they seem bilingual ... When I see Japanese people speaking English fluently, for example with foreigners on the train, it is motivating, a kind of longing.”

Discussion of the Interview Results

Without needing a definition of performances, her criteria were clear, and her views on motivation were also expressed unequivocally. Yet many other kinds of prepared formal performances are possible, such as campus English contests and regional events (McCarty, 2008). Regarding online performances, this student participated in a YouTube video and a narrated slide show, while students in other classes since 2005 have played various roles in podcasts.

This diminutive, soft-spoken young Japanese woman was feeling pressure from various quarters and yet surprisingly stated that she was performing mainly for herself. Then she said that “performances motivate me to master English,” which is a testimonial to the pedagogical efficacy of formal EFL student performances. She also described a cycle of pressure, relief, and then satisfaction with herself when she did her best. She further stated that “the audience creates good tension,” which bears on the nature and efficacy of performances. What she called “good tension” is a quality of challenges or, in performance studies applied to L2 pedagogy, productive pressure.

A striking result of the interview was that this one student explicitly displayed both instrumental and integrative motivation. English is “more of a tool” when the performance arises artificially and is evaluated according to extrinsic institutional parameters. On the other hand, she feels a “longing” toward the community where Japanese speak English fluently with foreigners and, in the case of wishing to be like bilingual TV characters, it is literally an imagined community (Norton, 2008). She also extols the spontaneous situations where she and her friends were intrinsically motivated to communicate with English speakers. Her words uphold the distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation, while supporting the theory that the latter correlates more strongly with success in L2 acquisition (Norris-Holt, 2001).

Conclusion

Student-generated content, presented online, brings learners closer to the target language community by such means as addressivity to an audience. In one case, Voicethread failed to capture much of the student’s narration, but it was finally completed in the instructor’s office. When the author posted the URL to a mailing list, a collegial voice comment left on her slideshow by a European brought home to her the reach of online presentations. This could reinforce a
positive feedback loop for L2 motivation. The target community becomes more approachable along with the teacher, while a more personal relationship is motivating to students (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 31-39). Social networking outside of class, such as with Mixi, is another way to aim for enhanced integrative motivation (McCarty, 2009).

Even when the students perform anonymously to conceal personal information, they show undiminished personal satisfaction at the achievement. Affective factors are difficult to measure but vital to motivation. It is palpable to students if the teacher is willing to spend extra time with them and values their performance by making it a lasting product online. So the experience could be transformative in terms of integrative motivation, toward turning the foreign language into their own second language.

This and related papers have begun to place practices utilizing online technologies into a theoretical framework of motivation and performances, with pedagogical analyses by outside observers, and a student view. More evidence across cultures is needed, however, to demonstrate the efficacy of formal performances for EFL acquisition and motivation, particularly how integrative motivation can be enhanced by online performances. The purpose of this paper will have been served if these directions of enquiry prove useful for future research.

References


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