

S-face

SFC makes the future through researches

Designing learning environments and blazing a new trail for foreign language acquisition Ikumi Waragai



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Linking teaching materials with practical life to provide support for foreign language acquisition

In our attempts to acquire proficiency in a foreign language, it is difficult to make sufficient headway simply by studying the language in a classroom.

It is when we first apply what we have learned to actual situations in everyday life that we acquire the practical skills. However, it is rare for learners to be able to skillfully apply what they have studied to practice.

With the desire to bring lessons and practice closer together, Professor Ikumi Waragai is working on creating a new foreign-language learning environment.

The philosophy behind her work is to put emphasis on learning environment design, based on the premise of having a group of diverse learners.

To bring about the realization of this philosophy, she is developing teaching materials and learning support systems that can be customized to suit the learning style of each student.

Experiencing lessons from the classroom in an everyday environment

Foreign language acquisition can be understood through two aspects: “formal learning” which refers to learning in the classroom, and “informal learning” which refers to learning outside of the classroom. When learning a language, even if the learner acquires a large volume of words and sentences as knowledge, this remains as little more than knowledge if the learner is unable to put it into practice in the field, and does not become a “usable” practical skill for the learner. If we were able to build a learning environment that links the two by enabling the immediate application of the fundamental knowledge gained through formal learning in the field of informal

learning, learners may be able to make dramatic progress in language acquisition. To achieve this, I am working on creating an experience-oriented ubiquitous language learning environment, supporting informal learning abroad, in collaboration with researchers from the fields of database systems and ubiquitous computing. To put it simply, this learning environment support system detects the positional information of the learner using the GPS function installed on their smartphone or other mobile device, and maps out in advance teaching materials, such as conversations and vocabulary, for situations that could arise at these specific locations, then provides the learner with the materials in the event that he or she actually encounters the situation. The

teaching materials come in various formats, including texts, videos, images, and audio, and the learner can select the materials that are most suitable for him or her at that point in time. This project has been made possible precisely because of SFC’s^(*) interdisciplinary research capabilities, and we are gradually designing a dynamic learning environment through the project.

*1 Keio University Shonan Fujisawa Campus

Using social media to improve writing skills

Another project is building a support system for improving practical writing skills. When learning a foreign language, it is difficult to provide individual instruction for writing skills in the classroom, and

learning through support provided in informal learning is also considered to be difficult. Recently, however, communication through social media has become increasingly common, and social media is frequently used as a space for disseminating messages. The writing style on social media is similar to speech rather than the conventional creation of “essays.” For learners, in particular university students, many of the opportunities that they receive for creating output (that is not necessarily limited to foreign languages) comes in the form of disseminating messages on social media. Hence, the research is conducted based on the hypothesis that social media, which is one of the everyday environments learners find themselves in, could possibly be harnessed as a learning support system. With the cooperation of students enrolled in the German-language course, I study the process leading up to posting on social media, and consider how it could be possible to provide learning support through social media. Learners always tend to look up words in dictionaries or online before writing them down, however, the use of online communities has been added to these information sources, which changes learners’ writing processes. In the various communities that they are members of, learners pose questions directly to native speakers, such as “What

do you think of this expression?” Through such online communication, they then try to find the expressions and vocabulary that match what they are trying to say. I am considering the possibility of building an efficient foreign language acquisition support system that corresponds with this behavior. In particular, by utilizing the fact that the publication of a post is a behavior that is observed when a person wishes to disseminate information about an event to those around them, I draw up hypothetical situations and events that could arise in the learner’s environment, based on information obtained through the GPS function, and explore the possibilities of various learning support systems, such as the development of a system that can allow learners to pick up expressions and vocabulary.

Conducting research on literary works from the perspective of religious languages

As part of my individual research work, I am also engaged in the analysis of religious languages. In particular, when translating Japanese literary works into other languages, there are many cases where religious languages are used in the depictions of a person’s inner mind. I conduct analysis on the logic conversions

that occur during such situations, and on the differences between world views and perspectives.

Conducting analysis and research on literary works from the perspective of religious languages sheds light on how religious elements (including the symbols, metaphors, and allegories that are important components of the Christian faith) function as a means of expression. Japan does not have a social background that is founded upon Christian ideology, so the contents that are absorbed by the reader when he or she identifies the religious elements contained in the message disseminated are different. Regardless of the literary work, this is a phenomenon that definitely arises in communication mediated by everyday “languages.”

We can see commonalities between the elements found in iconography^{(*)2} as well as the elements of non-verbal communication. By understanding the functions of means of expression, and taking a fresh look at the world through that perspective, we can then introduce a new scope of understanding to our own perspectives. I believe this is an important point that we have to communicate to students through lectures at university.

*2 A field of study that examines and considers the meaning behind iconography.

Use of social media



Research is conducted based on the hypothesis that it may be possible to utilize social media, which learners are very familiar with, as a learning support system. In this project, the process leading up to posting on social media is examined, and studies are conducted to find out how support can be provided for learning within this process.

d-mode



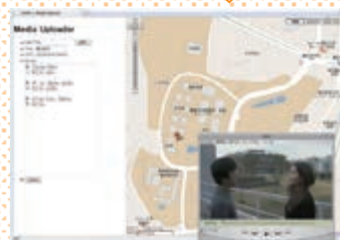
This is a set of teaching materials for autonomous learning, targeted at students learning German at SFC. It is compatible with SFC’s German-language curriculum and its teaching materials.



Building an experience-oriented language learning environment



This project involves the building of a ubiquitous learning environment targeted at foreign language learners, by harnessing the merits offered by mobile devices such as the GPS function on smartphones. Attempts are now being made to link classroom learning with the actual “spaces” of everyday life outside of the classroom.



Profile Ikumi Waragai

Professor, Faculty of Policy Management, Keio University. Professor Waragai holds Ph.D from the University of Bonn, a public university in Germany. She specializes in literary research and foreign language education. In her seminar, she works together with students to conduct empirical analysis and investigations into the relationship between language as a means of expression and literary works, as well as various forms of media content.

Please visit S-face website for details!

There are more articles and video of Ikumi Waragai



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