Learner Awareness of Metacognitive Person & Task Knowledge

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Keywords

Metacognitive knowledge, Person knowledge, Task knowledge, Learner awareness

Abstract

This paper represents the results of part of a research project into the metacognitive knowledge of a class of Japanese university students who planned to become teachers of English. The research was instigated by the teaching of a course in L2 Vocabulary Teaching and Learning which brought about the desire to determine whether or not the course contents could change the learners' approach to and awareness of their own vocabulary learning. The research attempted to find if the range and type of vocabulary learning strategies could be increased due to the learning in the course, which was fairly explicit instruction and included the theory and research base behind certain learning strategies. But moreover, this study attempted to discover to what extent the learners themselves were aware of the effects on their own learning of what they had learned in the course. This meant attempting to uncover the learners' metacognitive awareness about their own vocabulary learning. Flavell's (1979) three part (person, task, strategy) metacognitive knowledge was adopted as the theoretical framework for the research. Students completed semi-structured questionnaires five times during the year and the results were analyzed and categorized. This paper reports only on the person and task knowledge found.

Learning a second language is tough. Especially tedious are the many hours spent learning vocabulary. What makes it all even worse is that vocabulary is at the heart of any language, and learning a great deal of it is necessary to be able to function competently. As a teacher of English in Japan, I am naturally concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of my students' vocabulary learning. This sort of concern directly leads one to learning strategies, but even beyond learning strategies

themselves, to learners' metagcognitive knowledge which Wendon (1991) following Flavell's (1979) work, defines as knowledge which "includes all facts learners acquire about their own cognitive processes as they are applied and used to gain knowledge and acquire skills in varied situations" (Wendon, 1991, p. 34). Flavell (1979, 1981) distinguishes three types of metacognitive knowledge: person, task and strategy, but the part of the study described here focuses on only person and task knowledge[1]. Wendon (1991, pp. 35-43) describes person knowledge as general knowledge learners have about how learning takes place and how different factors like age, aptitude and learning styles can influence language learning. It also includes what learners know about themselves as learners, and the beliefs they have about what leads to their success or failure in language learning. Task knowledge is what learners know about the purpose, demands and nature of learning tasks. It also includes their knowledge of the procedures required to carry out these tasks.

In addition are two other factors which can influence the effectiveness and efficiency of learners' vocabulary learning. One is whether explicit or implicit learning strategy instruction is more effective in improving learning (Chamot, 2005). Explicit instruction is when teachers set out to develop their students' awareness of their strategies, and it includes identifying strategies, modeling strategies and giving students practice with various strategies. Implicit instruction is when the instruction is integrated within a language course. Strategies are not identified as such, but they are practiced as part of the course activities (Chamot, 2005). The right strategy instruction can perhaps help learners be more successful.

The other area of concern, and perhaps the more important of these two, is that of learner resistance to strategy instruction, which has been documented in Asia (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Schmitt, N., Bird, R., Tseng, A.-C., & Yang, -C. (1997) have found that the learning culture is important because learners from different cultural backgrounds sometimes have different opinions about the usefulness of various vocabulary learning strategies.

The importance of these issues: learners' metacognitive strategy knowledge, the issue of explicit or implicit strategy instruction, and the problem of learner resistance to strategy instruction in Asia prompted this research. I wondered if the course I was teaching in Second Language Vocabulary Teaching and Learning influenced the students own learning of English vocabulary, and if so, to what extent.

Flavell's (1979) typography has been used in researching metacognitive knowledge by various researchers. Goh's two papers (1997, 1999) investigated listening beliefs among Chinese learners of English. In her 1997 diary study she used Flavell's framework

(1979, 1981) and reports that learners made comments on all three of Flavell's knowledge types. As person knowledge, they reported a range of problems they had with the listening process, including their own shortcomings, such as inefficient memory and personality. As task knowledge, they reported factors that made the listening difficult or easy, including different types of oral texts. For strategic knowledge, they displayed an awareness of a range of strategies, both top-down and bottom-up. In 1999, she again examined the factors that learners believed influenced their listening, relating to the text, the speaker, the listener and the environment. She found that the higher ability listeners appeared to have a wider range of metacognitive knowledge as they perceived of the listening process as an interaction between the listener, the text and the environment in which the listening interaction took place.

Also investigating listening, Graham (2006) looked at English speaking learner's perceptions of themselves as listeners of French. She found they recognized some task difficulties, and that most learners attributed their difficulties to their own supposed low ability in the skill (person knowledge) and to the difficulty of the listening tasks and texts they were given (task knowledge). Graham argues that such "attributions indicate a sense of passivity and helplessness in learners, in that little or nothing can be done about the difficulty of the work one is given or one's ability." She notes that students in the interviews "displayed little insight into what strategies might be appropriate for listening and the need to monitor and evaluate any strategies that they did employ" (strategic knowledge) (178).

An interest in the extent to which learners are aware of how they might realistically address some of their perceived listening problems stimulated Vogely's (1995) research. She reported on the listening beliefs (person knowledge) of English speaking learners of Spanish in a U.S. university by examining what students thought a good listener was, what made an authentic listening task difficult (task knowledge), and their perception of their use of comprehension and repair strategies (strategy knowledge). Although the students reported feeling that factors to do with the text had the most effect on the level of difficulty of a listening text, very few reported using strategies that focused on and addressed such difficulties (169).

In a study on the strategies used by two successful second language writers of English and two less successful writers, Victori (1999) found the less successful ones lacked effective cognitive strategies, appropriate style preferences, awareness of their own writing problems (person knowledge), knowledge of the writing task (task knowledge), and understanding that writing involves deliberate effort and commitment to the task (task knowledge) (551). Her study adds another dimension to the understanding of metacognitive knowledge, e.g., the range, complexity and appropriateness of that

knowledge. She calls for enhancing person knowledge to be a goal of EFL writing instruction.

In an attempt to bridge the gap between listening theory and practice by teaching students how to listen, Vandergrift (2003), systematically led students through the process of listening as part of regular listening activities thereby encouraging students to practice the metacognitive processes involved in listening. Results showed that this approach "can (a) encourage students to take on the responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning and, (b) motivate students through success that makes them feel good about themselves and their abilities" (Vandergrift, 2003, p. 435). This echoes Victori's (1999) call for enhancing person knowledge.

In terms of vocabulary learning, Gu & Johnson (1996) looked into the vocabulary learning strategies used by Chinese university learners of English[2] and the relationship between their strategies and outcomes in learning English. Although they were not specifically investigating metacognitive knowledge, they did find that two metacognitive strategies studied: "self-initiation, and selective attention",[3] emerged as positive predictors of general proficiency. They also found that contextual guessing, skillful use of dictionaries (as opposed to looking up for comprehension only), note-taking, paying attention to word formation, contextual encoding, and activation of newly learned words (intentional activation of new words) also positively correlated with the test scores. Emphasized were the facts that learning a word includes much more than remembering the written form, oral form and the meaning (L1 equivalent). "A large part of EFL vocabulary learning involves learning to use words syntactically and pragmatically" (Richards, 1976). "Vocabulary learning should hence aim toward vocabulary in action" (Gu & Johnson, 1996, p. 659). They claim, (based on Carter, 1987; Judd, 1978; McCarthy, 1984) that vocabulary should not be perceived as items in isolation, but as a skill to be developed. By skill, which they consider to be plural, they include recognizing a word automatically in natural contexts, guessing what a word means, and most importantly, the skill of using a word correctly and appropriately (659-660).

All of these studies highlight the importance of metacognitive knowledge for the learning process and hence to its outcomes. But an investigation into specifically the metacognitive knowledge behind learners' struggles with learning a second language vocabulary has yet to come to light.

The Study

Participants

The participants in the study were 33 mostly third and fourth year English majors (20 and 21 year olds) who planned to become teachers of English in high schools, junior high schools or perhaps elementary schools. As this was in a women's university, all participants were women.

A questionnaire, in April, on the first day of the course, disclosed some of their vocabulary learning history during the year previous to commencement of this course. This information shows that among those who responded, the majority, 86%, were learning English vocabulary on their own, apart from a teacher's requirement. The major reasons given were TOEFL/TOEIC preparation, and improvement of their own English skills. This may have been the underlying reason those learners decided to take a course in learning and teaching L2 vocabulary. The results also show that although only 15% were studying just before tests, only 17% were studying vocabulary according to a regular schedule, and 83% were studying only occasionally. This indicates a rather hap-hazard approach to L2 vocabulary learning.

The course

The 90 minute, once a week, year long course (two 13 week semesters: April-July; Sept.-Jan.) was organized as a series of modules covering the following topics: introduction to vocabulary learning: e.g., word knowledge (what does knowing a word mean? (see Nation, 2001)), what makes a word difficult to learn (as in Laufer, 1997); the mental lexicon (how words are retained in long-term memory); vocabulary learning strategies; incidental & intentional learning[4]; vocabulary assessment; collocations; and applications to teaching in the form of mini-teaching demonstrations. The course also encouraged the learners to apply what they learned to their own weekly vocabulary learning (with quizzes). In the first semester, students were strongly encouraged to make word cards following Schmitt & Schmitt's (1995) guidelines. During the second semester, students were free to pursue any type of intentional learning they chose.

As direct cause and effect cannot be claimed between the course and any changes the learners may have made due to the many factors involved, the three following research questions on metacognitive knowledge came out of the above.

(1) What metacognitive knowledge (Flavell's (1979) person, task and strategy knowledge) was reported as used before the course and by the end of the course?

(2) Was there any discernable difference in the amount and depth of reported metacognitive knowledge, particularly strategy knowledge?

(3) Could an increase in the range of strategies the learners used be detected during the course? (Data from the first questionnaire in April were categorized separately

from the data from the other four questionnaires (June-January) which were categorized together.)

Methodology

To these ends, first, an open-ended, retrospective self-report questionnaire was administered five times during the year to the class (April, June, Sept., Nov., & Jan.), filled out at home and returned to me beginning on the first day of the course in April and ending at its completion in January. The questions were to provide some guidance for the students in retrospecting about their L2 vocabulary learning experiences. In the beginning, the students needed to learn what and how (in what detail) to supply useful information.

Following Goh (2000), it was felt that this method of using open-ended, retrospective self-report questionnaires would allow a fair number of learners sufficient opportunities over a year to reveal their metacognitive strategies and the changes in them that were occurring, but without limiting those learners to Likert-scale pre-selected responses. Moreover, asking the learners to reflect on their own experiences in studying English vocabulary could provide them with the opportunity for reflecting on their own learning. It was hoped that the use of such questionnaires would elicit actual experience rather than mere speculation and that something of the learners' own metacognitive knowledge could be discovered, i.e., if, and to what extent they were able to draw some conclusions about their learning processes.

The data were initially sorted as to student so that a profile of their answers over the course of the year was created for each student. Unfortunately, complete profiles are not available for each student as some were absent on questionnaire days. When each file had been put together, the responses for the first (the April) questionnaires and the other (June-January) questionnaires were examined separately[5]. For both sets, keywords and key expressions were underlined. These words and expressions were sorted and categorized into person, task or strategy knowledge and sub-categories were created. The first or April questionnaires were done first, followed by the second or June-January set. Care was taken that the sub-categories came directly out of the data from each separate set of questionnaires and not from some predetermined taxonomy or from the taxonomy of the other set.

The groupings and sub-categories thus discovered could not be confirmed by a second researcher so, in order to check their accuracy, the data were put away for almost a year and then completely re-examined and categorized a second time. This second examination and categorization of the data was then compared to the first and any discrepancies were examined a third time.

Results

Results follow for two types of Flavell's (1979) metacognitive knowledge: person and task. Each type of knowledge begins with the results from the April questionnaire (April Accounts), which are followed by the results from the June-January questionnaires (June-January Accounts). Under each set of accounts are the items given by the learners arranged into categories and sub-categories. The items under each category or sub-category are arranged from most reported to least reported. The number of learners reporting each item appears in parenthesis after the item name. When a learner reported the same item twice or more on different dates, it was counted only once (except in the case of the April versus the June-January sets of data). The number of learners reporting each category is only one time a learner reported it within that set of data.

It was sometimes difficult to determine if something was a part of person knowledge or strategy knowledge. When doubt occurred, it was categorized as strategy knowledge.

Person Knowledge

Wendon (1991) describes this knowledge as the general knowledge learners have about how learning takes place and how different factors like age, aptitude and learning styles can influence language learning. It also includes what learners know about themselves as learners, and the beliefs they have about what leads to their success or failure in language learning (35-43). Victori (1999) defines it as "the knowledge one holds about oneself and others as cognitive processors" (539).

Reports on person knowledge overall were very limited (especially as compared to strategy knowledge) as the questionnaire did not specifically focus on this aspect of metacognitive knowledge. All learner reports in this area of metacognitive knowledge were incidental to questions focusing on actions and results.

APRIL ACCOUNTS

Self-concept (one's concept of oneself as a vocabulary learner & degree of confidence in one's capacity for learning vocabulary (adapted from Goh, 1997 & Victori, 1999))

    "I often have difficulty memorizing words" (1)

    "I think that I need more time to memorize vocabulary than others" (1)

    "I thought I would never succeed in learning lots of vocabulary, . . . " (1)

    "I'm poor at vocabulary" (1)

JUNE-JANUARY ACCOUNTS

Factors that affect L2 vocabulary learning

Problems with learning words

    Words with similar forms are confusing (2)

    Words with same/opposite meaning are confusing (1)

    Use of computer (spelling checker) leads to bad spelling (1)

Obstacles to L2 vocabulary development

    No time (1)

    Not enough time (1)

    Too much other homework (1)

    Have no idea how to study (reported in July; by Jan. she reported successful use of strategies) (1)

    Confused by unknown words (1)

Learning style

    Visual (1)

Psychological/cognitive behaviors

    Takes time to get used to new ways of learning; patience is necessary (1)

Self-concept (one's concept of oneself as a vocabulary learner & degree of confidence in one's capacity for learning vocabulary (adapted from Goh, 1997 & Victori, 1999))

Situational self-esteem (how one appraises oneself in specific situations or as regards specific abilities, e.g., communication (adapted from Wendon, 1991, p. 57)) In this case, as future English L2 teachers in Japan.

    I feel I got the idea about how I can teach vocabulary (1)

    Learning about learning and vocabulary makes me a better teacher (1)

    I can be a better teacher (1)

    The first step to teaching is to be conscious of what and how to learn (1)

Task self-esteem (particular tasks within situations (Wendon, 1991, p. 57)) In this case, as L2 vocabulary learners.

    Strategies are important in vocabulary learning (not my lack of ability) (2)

    Stopped confusion from putting similar words together (1)

    No longer worried about forgetting (1)

    More serious about learning (1)

    Strategies are important in vocabulary learning (not my lack of ability) (1)

    Can memorize more than before (1)

<u>Motivation</u> (knowledge about one's interest in vocabulary and vocabulary learning (adapted from Goh, 1997 & Victori, 1999, p. 540))

    This class with weekly quizzes (18)

    TOEIC, TOEFL, STEP (4)

    To know vocabulary in daily life (1)

    Enjoyment (1)

Even though the April accounts consist of only four learners' accounts, these reveal that at least some of the learners at the beginning of the course had a low self-concept/self-confidence in themselves as vocabulary learners. They seemed to hold the belief that their efforts to learn vocabulary were not successful due to their own lack of ability. This finding echoes Graham's (2006) findings that learners perceived their difficulties as being related to their own low ability. She maintains that this leads to passivity and helplessness in learners.

With the June-January accounts, many more instances of person knowledge appeared, particularly as concerns self-concept. The focus of their entries appears to have shifted from themselves as unsuccessful learners (a rather defeatist attitude) to more on what can be done to improve their own learning (a much more positive attitude). They seem to be beginning to realize that difficulties in vocabulary learning are perhaps less due to their own inabilities and more due to what they are doing as learners: "strategies are important in vocabulary learning (not my lack of ability)" ; "stopped confusion from putting similar words together" ; "no longer worried about forgetting" ; "can memorize more than before." It is possible that such changes are due to course content.

In addition, the problems with learning words they reported between June and January show an understanding of vocabulary learning with "words with similar forms are confusing", and "words with same/opposite meaning are confusing." These and other, aspects of vocabulary learning were covered in the course content. These accounts could be the result of the respondent writing what she thinks the researcher wants to hear, but on the other hand, these learners had first hand experience with intentional (and incidental) vocabulary learning through the course. It is hoped that these accounts came out of both course content and noticing (see Schmidt, 1990) through personal experience.

The "enjoyment" factor in motivation was "I'll enjoy being imaginative to create as many hooks as possible." The hooks refer to memory hooks used to connect new information to old information to pull the new information into long-term memory (part of the course content). This certainly reveals task knowledge, but that knowledge

leads to this learner's delight in being able to use this knowledge for her own enjoyable future learning.

As person knowledge includes beliefs and attitudes held by learners about themselves, learning, and language, such knowledge might quite strongly affect their learning and is therefore pertinent (Paris & Winograd, 1990) to their learning. Research underway will hopefully make up for the paucity of data in this important area and will shed more light on it.

Task knowledge

Wendon (1991) describes this knowledge as "what learners know about the purpose, demands, and nature of learning tasks. It also includes their knowledge of the procedures that constitute these tasks" (42-43). Victori (1999) describes it as "the knowledge that one has about the information, and resources needed to undertake a task, as well as about the nature and degree of effort performing it" (539).

There was almost nothing reported as regards task knowledge in the April responses. This may have been due to the fact that this type of information was not directly requested, but may also be due to lack of knowledge on the part of the learners. However, in subsequent reports (June-Jan.) an abundance of task knowledge was apparent.

APRIL ACCOUNTS

Factors that affect L2 vocabulary learning

Nature of L2 (English) vocabulary

    Vocabulary learning equals only learning/memorizing one Japanese
    meaning equivalent (6)

Factors that affect learning

    Some review is necessary, but mostly only before tests (4)
    Did not take vocabulary leaning seriously (1)
    Many steps are involved in vocabulary learning (1)
    Learn words together that have similar forms (1)

Problems with learning words

    Spelling (1)

Nature of the task

    " It's tough work to memorize words" (2)

JUNE-JANUARY ACCOUNTS: During the course

Factors that affect L2 vocabulary learning

Nature of language

    Importance of the place of vocabulary in the language system (6)

Nature of L2 (English) vocabulary

    Many types of vocabulary knowledge (10)

    Knowledge of word family & word parts (8)

Factors that affect learning

    Relating new information to old (15)

    Need for review: regular or expanded (9)

    Effort needed to learn L2 vocabulary (8)

    Many steps involved in L2 vocabulary learning (5)

    Forgetting is part of learning process (4)

    Concentration/deep thinking/attention necessary when meeting a new word (4)

    Many strategies exist for learning - not just the one (word lists) (4)

    Some words are more difficult to learn than others (3)

    Special efforts are needed to learn difficult to learn words (3)

    Learning is a process (2)

    Expanding memory strategies is effective (1)

    Incidental learning is also important for vocabulary learning (1)

    Many ways to retrieve words is better than one; the more hooks or associations, the better (1)

    Using different strategies for different types of word knowledge (1)

    Conscious noticing of newly learned words in reading/listening (1)

Nature of the task of L2 (English) vocabulary learning

    Learning is a slow process; leaning takes time (4)

    Specific learning/different strategies for TOEFL/TOEIC preparation (1)

    Different types of word knowledge require different strategies to learn (1)

Input useful for developing L2 (English) vocabulary

    Textbooks for reading (probably most)

    Movies in English with subtitles (5)

    Textbooks/CDs/web sites for vocabulary development (5)

    Extensive reading: stories, newspapers (5)

    English web pages (2)

    Plays (2)

    Speaking English (abroad) with non-Japanese speakers (2)

Cell phone/computer in English (1)

Series of DVDs (1)

Listening to stories (1)

Radio English (1)

TV programs in English (1)

Writing a diary in English (1)

Singing English songs (1)

There is quite a bit to be noted here. In April, six learners reported that learning one Japanese meaning equivalent for a word was tantamount to knowing the English word. This is, of course, incorrect knowledge and is quite different from later reports that there are many types of word knowledge by ten learners and about the existence of word families and word parts by eight learners.[6] As this was covered by the course content, it appears that their knowledge of the nature of vocabulary (English in particular, in this case) had changed and deepened during the course. Another interesting account here by six learners is the "importance of the place of vocabulary in the language system." This is higher level knowledge than was revealed in April and shows understanding at the level of language, not just of a particular language.

The first thing to notice about the accounts under *Factors that affect learning,* is the huge increase in the number of accounts between June and January. In addition, four of the April accounts state that "some review is necessary but mostly only before tests" showing a lack of understanding of the necessity for systematic review in learning vocabulary and also that extrinsic motivation in the form of tests was important to their learning. This is not the case after April when nine learners suggest that review was not only necessary, but either as "expanded rehearsal[7]" or as some sort of regular review, and there was no mention of "only before tests". "Expanded rehearsal" was discussed in class, but through their learning experience during the class,[8] they seem to have experienced that for learning to be permanent (and to become automatic for use), repeated exposures are necessary. Also after April, during the course, five learners explicitly reported that vocabulary learning is a process of many steps, while in the April accounts there was only one learner who reportedly showed such awareness. Researchers have come to believe that it is not single strategies that differentiate between successful and less successful learners, but combinations of strategies employed for the learning goal (e.g., see Gu & Johnson (1996)).

Learning words together that have similar forms (meanings, sounds or are part of lexical sets) may cause confusion for the learner and make learning more difficult (see Nation, 1990, 2001; Laufer, 1997; Erten & Tekin, 2008). Therefore, "learn words together with similar forms" (under April's *Factors that affect learning*) may be

counterproductive to efficient learning, and indeed, that same learner later reported that when she stopped trying to learn similar words together, she was no longer confused and saw improvement in her learning.

In general, before the course began, as reported in the April accounts, it can be seen that learners had certain misconceptions about vocabulary learning, which might have been working against their efforts to learn. With the June to January accounts, the learners were reporting a more realistic approach to the task of L2 vocabulary learning. As the questionnaire focused on the actions of the learners and the results, it is probable that this more realistic approach was bearing fruit.

Discussion

This study of the metacognitive knowledge of a group of learners employed an open-ended, retrospective self-report questionnaire, which was semi-structured and written. Wendon (1991, p. 83) has pointed out that there are limitations to this type of research instrument. Such reports are asking the learner to retrospect about something that happened in the past so that forgetting is always an issue. Also, the fact that they are somewhat structured does limit the learner's account, and if there is no follow-up interview as in this study, there is no chance to probe more deeply. One is quite literally stuck with what one has, and "one can ask how much self-reports reflect reality" (Gu & Johnson, 1996, p. 669). But in answer, these learners had not taken part in similar studies before, and therefore, they had not been exposed to theoretical and empirical work on learning strategies so that their reports may be honest as far as they went.

With these limitations in mind, this piece of action research set out to discover whether some of the learning objectives of the course (e.g., learning about human learning, English vocabulary, the nature of the task of English vocabulary learning, and about strategies for accomplishing that learning task and evaluating the results) would, in any way, affect the learners' own perceptions of themselves as learners and their approach to their own vocabulary learning in terms of Flavell's (1979) metacognitive knowledge, i.e., person, task and strategy knowledge. Specifically, the three research questions determined to find what metacognitive knowledge was reported before and at the end of the course, whether there was any difference in the amount and depth of that knowledge at the end of the course, and whether the range of strategies had increased by the end of the course. But due to the nature of the questions in the open-ended questionnaires, which focused on the learners' actions and results, the person and task knowledge reported was somewhat incidental to the main target of the research. In spite of this, however, a surprising amount of both person and task knowledge was revealed as reported in this paper.

Analysis of the data disclosed, in terms of person knowledge at the start of the course, lack of awareness of their learning problems (see Victori, 1999) and, possible low self-esteem[9] by some learners with accounts that reflected beliefs that their lack of success in learning L2 vocabulary was due to their own lack of ability (Graham, 2006, found the same). Indications of changes over the year in learner attitudes toward vocabulary and their own vocabulary learning were quite pronounced.[10] By the end of the course, accounts were focusing on what the learner could DO on her own to overcome difficulties, not on her own lack of ability, which can easily lead to "learned helplessness."[11] By focusing on the actions a learner can do irrespective of the teacher, wrongly held beliefs and assumptions can be overcome and self-confidence in the learner's own capability can surface (see Wendon, 1991, pp. 52-60).

This growing self-confidence appears to have come out of their learning, and then self-discovery of how that learning takes place, vocabulary learning in particular. The knowledge was often task knowledge, but the result was person knowledge, what Wendon (1991) refers to as "task self-esteem" where self-esteem is "the evaluation a person makes and holds with regard to himself" (Brown, 1987 cited in Wendon, 1991, p. 57) and task self-esteem is "self-esteem in particular tasks within situations". This knowledge can lead to motivation from a combination of their own success and feeling good about their abilities (Vandergrift, 2003, p. 435).

Learners' beliefs are a part of person knowledge. These beliefs about the nature of learning, language and vocabulary; the task of learning vocabulary; and the strategies that lead to effective learning are a vital part of the cognitive apparatus which functions in learning. In addition are the beliefs the learner holds about him/herself as a learner, successful or not, which add up to self-esteem and the belief that one can succeed in L2 language learning or not, i.e., "learned helplessness". The belief that "improvement in one's learning is possible through improved use of strategies or application of skills may help to protect students' self-esteem and motivation even when it seems they are making limited progress" (Shunk, 1996). It may also be the link that is necessary for learners when they make the transition to more advanced language study (Graham, 2004). This makes such knowledge of the greatest importance, something teachers cannot ignore; addressing the learners' person and task knowledge is one of the ways teachers can help their learners become more efficient and more effective learners.

As for task knowledge, very little was reported in April. What was reported revealed a lack of knowledge of the task of L2 vocabulary learning, especially of the effort required to accomplish the task at hand (see Victori, 1999). In addition, much of what was reported in April was wrong knowledge, but the June to January accounts

indicate a growing awareness of this type of knowledge, especially of knowledge of the nature of vocabulary. It cannot be claimed from this research, but it may be that the misconceptions reported in April were having an adverse effect on learning. By having the chance to apply the knowledge learned in the course to the vocabulary learning task in the class, the learners could learn through their own experience and see improvement in their learning. It is important to have a chance to apply, and actually try out on one's own, new concepts about learning and L2 vocabulary. As Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1992) have pointed out, "learners should be invited to explore fully the link between strategy use and learning outcomes."

However, perhaps equally important to a paucity of knowledge and wrong knowledge is the range and appropriateness of both person and task knowledge (see Victori, 1999). Comparing the April and the June-January accounts, large increases in both the range and appropriateness of both person and task knowledge can be seen. As noted above, Victori (1999) called for enhancing person knowledge as a goal of a language course (in her case, it was for writing courses).

A further and rather interesting aspect that came out of these self-reports was the level of articulation and growing awareness of the learners' own learning that was revealed over the course of the year. This may actually be one of the most important features to come out of this study. In April with the first reports, the learners were unable to describe their own learning and studying. By January, the reports were not only much longer and fluently written, but were full of detail and analysis.

Self reports can be a potent teaching/learning tool. Matsumoto (1996) found that diary keeping was viewed by learners as a valuable tool in their learning as it raised their awareness of their own L2 learning. This appears to be true on an individual case in this study, but perhaps could have been even more potent had the writings been shared by the learners, for they could have learned from each other about the strategies, beliefs and attitudes of other learners. Such comparisons could have been used to evaluate their own learning practices. Matsumoto's (1996) learners reported that discussions along these lines were particularly useful. Unfortunately, in this course, syllabus demands on time prevented this, although this is something for future research.

There is perhaps another positive feature to come out of diary keeping and increased awareness. That is after a year of describing and writing about their learning, a habit had been established of examining their own beliefs, awareness of task demands, and learning which may continue well after the course is over. This may also help them to continue to develop as learners with the motivation to overcome the hurdles that

inevitably occur in any long-term learning situation. In essence, this means becoming autonomous and life-long learners. As future teachers of English themselves, autonomy as a learner is something the learners in this class will want to model for their own students.

Self-reports can perhaps also contribute to learning in another way. A big challenge for teachers "is to help the learner close the gap between recognizing the elements of difficulty and effectively engaging the appropriate strategies to overcome those elements" (Vogely, 1995, p. 46). The accounts in this study appear to have helped these learners close that gap when learners can see the link between the strategies they use and their learning outcomes (see Goh, 2000) (see also Graham, 2006, pp. 186-188 for additional discussion on this topic).

Conclusion
The importance of metacognitive knowledge is underlined by Holec (1989, p. 146) when he states, "the learning process may be considered as a management process, i.e., as the making of the whole range of decisions necessary to plan and carry out a learning program." Research by Mizumoto & Takeuchi (2008) makes this more specific, by showing the importance of metacognitive strategies for Japanese learners who get high TOEIC scores. Metacognitive strategies were more highly correlated with TOEIC scores (p. 27). In addition, Wendon (1991) makes the point that metacognitive knowledge is strongly related to the learner's self-image, "the outcome of the evaluations that persons make with regard to themselves (i.e., of their self-esteem)" (p. 58). A negative self-image, not only influences language learning outcomes, but also shapes learners' attitudes towards learning autonomously (Wendon, 1991, p. 58).

Although no causative links can be made between the learning objectives of the course and the learners' advances in metacognitive awareness and knowledge, the fact does exist that such advances were apparent in the accounts. This study does in no way support this, but it seems to hint that it is possible that the knowledge acquired during the course, and the chance to put that knowledge to the test, and the encouragement to explore the processes and results all contributed to the changes apparent in these learners' metacognitive knowledge.

 In addition, the instruction was fairly explicit in that the theory and research behind why strategies work were given. It is also possible then that fairly explicit learning strategy instruction can, in fact, influence Japanese learners' approach and awareness of their own vocabulary learning, when that instruction includes the reasons for and background behind such strategies (in the form of theory and research). The question

of which is better, explicit or implicit instruction, was not directly addressed here, but it appears that perhaps a type of explicit instruction might have been successful. It might also suggest that the resistance to strategy training in Asia could possibly be in part due to the manner in which that training has been carried out. Perhaps, approaches to learning strategy instruction must vary according to the cultural and learning background of the learners (see Schmitt, Bird, Tseng, & Yang, 1997).[12] Only research can tell.

Notes

1   The results of this study for strategy metacognitive knowledge are in another paper. See Hamatani, E. P. (2008).

2   There is a similarity between the study by Gu & Johnson (1996) and the study reported here. Orthographically, Chinese as L1 learners and Japanese as L1 learners share kanji in their L1. Both are going from a kanji-based L1 to an alphabetically based L2 (English). Although it is out of the scope of this research, L1 orthography is an important element in L2 learning.

3   Gu & Johnson (1996) provide no definition for these metacognitive strategies.

4   Intentional learning is when the learner is focused on transferring information to long-term memory. There is intention to learn. Incidental learning, on the other hand, "can occur when one is using language for communicative purposes" (Schmitt, 2000, p. 120). There is no conscious intention to learn. It is, for example, the vocabulary that is picked up and the vocabulary knowledge that is deepened unintentionally in extensive reading. Intentional and incidental learning are not limited to L2 vocabulary or even to L2 learning, but are found in any type of learning.

5   The data from the first or April questionnaire was kept separate from the subsequent questionnaire data in order that a comparison could be made. Such a comparison is perhaps not entirely valid for a number of factors, one of which is the number of questionnaires. The April questionnaires were vastly outnumbered by those of the June-January set. However, to balance this, whenever a learner reported the same item twice or more on different dates in the June-January set, it was counted only once. The number of learners reporting each category is only one time a learner reported it within that set of data. A second factor making the comparison sticky is in the completeness of the responses. By January, the

learners were responding with not only more words, more complete responses, but with more in depth responses, displaying an increasing awareness of their own metacognitive processes and, even more importantly, awareness of their control over those processes.

6 The kind of misconception displayed by the six learners in April may be the result of their learning experiences in junior high school and high school classrooms in Japan. One of the learners in the class wrote, "Knowing the Japanese translation of a word is not enough knowledge of the word; however, for English classes in Japan, it is OK just to know the Japanese equivalent" (Seki, 2005). What this Japanese teacher-in-training student means is that 'to know a word', especially for productive use, the Japanese equivalent of that word is insufficient knowledge, but for junior high and high school English classes in Japan, learners are not expected to know any other type of knowledge. Tests in particular only require the one type of knowledge.

7 "Expanded rehearsal" refers to Pimsleur's (1967) and Baddeley's (1990, pp. 156-8) suggestions that learners should review new material soon after initial learning (e.g., 10-15 minutes after), and then at gradually increasing intervals (e.g., 24 hours later, and then one week later) (see also Schmitt, 1997, p. 216).

8 During the second semester of the course there were weekly vocabulary quizzes which tested not only words learned the week before (presented by three students each week) but also at any previous time during the course. In addition, they were quizzed on much more than the word's meaning (English or Japanese equivalent). This forced them to review each week and to be aware of and learn many types of word knowledge over a period of time. It was hoped that by experiencing what was taught in the lectures about learning would deepen the learning and make it more meaningful.

9 Wendon (1991, p. 57) defines "self-esteem" as "the evaluation a person makes and holds with regard to himself/herself." In the case of this study, it is the evaluation of the self as a learner of L2 vocabulary.

10 Indeed, by the course's end, all four of the learners with self-esteem issues had changed attitudes and reported improved learning.

11 "Learned helplessness" is "the result of failure in learning, or the belief that one has failed in learning. It is the unproductive belief that the self is incapable of learning and leads to deterioration in cognitive performance, which further

confirms the learner's belief that he/she is incapable of learning" (Wendon, 1991, p. 57).

12   The learners in this course were all intermediate level learners with fairly extensive L2 listening experience for an EFL situation. They were able to understand a course taught all in English, but for many, if not most university students in Japan, the type of metacognitive knowledge training described in this paper should probably be done in the learners' L1.

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Appendix

These are the five questionnaires that were given over the year to the students in the course. They were filled out at home and returned in the next class in order to take up less class time. The actual questionnaires had space between the questions so the learners could answer the questions on the questionnaire paper.

First Questionnaire (April, 2006)
1. About how many words did you try to learn last year?
2. Why did you try to learn them?
   a) Yes   No   Did your teachers require you to learn new vocabulary?
   b) Yes   No   Did you have vocabulary tests in your classes?
   c) Yes   No   Did you try to learn new vocabulary alone without a teacher's assignment?
   d) If your answer is Yes, why did you try to learn vocabulary even without a teacher's assignment?
3. Last year, what did you do to try to learn vocabulary (either for classes or alone)? How did you study? Describe specifically how you studied:
      First, I usually
      Secondly, I usually
      Then, I usually
4. How often did you study vocabulary?
   a) Yes   No   Only just before tests.
   b) Yes   No   Regularly (every day, every week, etc.)
   c) Yes   No   Occasionally (I have no schedule)
5. Comments:

Second Questionnaire (June, 2006)
1. What did you do within the last week to study or learn vocabulary (outside of this classroom)? Be specific. What exactly did you do? Use the back of this paper to describe what you did.
2. How often did you do it or them?
3. Did you try anything new (any new methods for learning vocabulary that you did not use last year)? What was it or them?
4. If you tried something new, how did it or they work?
5. Will you try using it or them again?
6. Why did you use it or them?

Third Questionnaire (September, 2006)

1. What did you do during the summer to study or learn vocabulary? Be specific. What exactly did you do? Use the back of this paper to describe what you did.
2. How often did you do it or them?
3. Did you try anything new (any new methods for learning vocabulary that you did not use last year)? What was it or them?
4. If you tried something new, how did it or they work?
5. Will you try using it or them again?
6. Why did you use it or them?

Fourth Questionnaire (November, 2006)

This is the same questionnaire as the second (June) questionnaire.

Final Questionnaire (January, 2007)

1. What have you done to learn the words likely to appear on the final test? (Write the method or procedure and also the frequency {how often} you used it/them)
2. Yes   No   During this course, have any of your methods for learning vocabulary changed?
   If yes, what did you do before and what are you doing now?
   If no, why not?
3. If you answered yes in 2 above, do the new methods seem to work better?
   If yes, why do you think they work better?
   If no, why do you think they do not work?
4. During this course have your attitudes or ideas about vocabulary and vocabulary acquisition changed?
   If yes, how have they changed?
   If yes, why have they changed? (What have you learned that has caused a change?)
5. As a result of this course, do you think you can be a better English teacher or learner of English? Why or why not?