

# **Conceptualisation of Learner Autonomy: Learner autonomy as the mediated capacity\***

Tetsushi Ohara, University of New South Wales  
tetsushiohara@hotmail.com

## **Abstract**

As most fields in language learning and teaching have contained the dichotomy focusing on either the individual or the social, the field of learner autonomy in language learning also contains the dichotomous view to analyse and understand learner autonomy. In order to deepen our understanding of learner autonomy, it is necessary to look for approaches which view a dialectic unity between the individual and social views. Sociocultural theory (SCT) based on the concept of mediation is one of the approaches which have a potential to provide us with a different way to conceptualise learner autonomy. While using SCT as the main theoretical framework, this article attempts to reconceptualise learner autonomy in language learning. Qualitative data from a Japanese language classroom indicate that learners' capacity to take control of their own learning is associated with how they create interpersonal relationships with their classmates. The interpersonal relationships work as mediational means (artifacts) to take control of their own learning. From this finding, it is argued that the capacity to take control of one's own learning belongs to not only individual learners but also their engagement with artifacts. Thus, learner autonomy can be conceptualised as the learner's socioculturally mediated capacity to take control of one's own learning.

## **Keywords**

Learner autonomy, Sociocultural theory, Mediation, Interpersonal relationship, Language learning in classrooms

## **1. Introduction**

The dichotomy between individual and social approaches has been often seen in the literature of human development and learning. Individual approaches that language learning is a uniquely individual process can be traced back to the rise of psycholinguistics in the 1960s and is associated with the rise of learner-centred perspectives on language teaching (Benson and Cooker 2013: 1). This view is originally related to the emphasis of concepts such as individual differences, autonomy, and learning strategies (Benson and Cooker 2013: 1). Social approaches to language learning are associated with the rise of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and discourse

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analysis in the 1960s (Benson and Cooker 2013: 1). The main argument of the social approaches is that language learning is shaped by social and cultural contexts.

Rogoff (1995: 139) argues, “Development research has commonly limited attention to either the individual or the environment... with an emphasis on either separate individuals or independent environmental elements as the basic unit of analysis”. Even recent books in language learning still describe the existence of dichotomy between the individual and the social approaches. For example, Benson and Cooker (2013: 11) argue the reason to start organising a book on identity, motivation, and autonomy in language learning as, “Our starting point was the observation that social approaches have tended to define themselves in opposition to the individualistic ‘Other’ of the mainstream SLA [Second Language Acquisition] research”. In short, in the field of human development including language learning, the dichotomy between the individual and social approaches has persistently existed for decades.

As the dichotomy between the individual and the social is often seen in the literature of human development, the literature of learner autonomy also contains perspectives based on the dichotomy between the individual and the social. Holec (1981: 3) defines learner autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. On the one hand, some researchers pay great attention to individual learners’ personal attributes to analyse and understand learner autonomy. On the other hand, some others emphasise the importance of social and cultural factors to contextualise learning processes in which learners are engaging. However, separating between the individual and social perspectives or emphasising only one of them and treating another as a supplement does not provide us with better understanding of language learning including learner autonomy. It is important to find a way to “live in the middle (Holquist 1994, cited in Wertsch 1998)” of the individual and social perspectives.

This paper would try to propose how we can conceptualise a process of taking control of one’s own learning (Benson 2001) in language classrooms while emphasising finding a way to live in the middle of the individual and social perspectives.

## **2. Individual and social approaches in language learning**

The concept of learner autonomy first entered the field of language learning and teaching through the Council of Europe’s Modern Languages Project during the early 1970’s (Benson 2001: 8). Scholars such as Holec (1981) began to emphasise the significance of learner autonomy due to the emerging field of adult self-directed learning insisting “on the need to develop the individual’s freedom by developing those abilities which will enable him to act more responsibly in running the affairs of the society in which he lives” (Benson 2001: 8). Thus, the early studies on autonomy are closely related to the concept of self-directed learning in adult self-learning contexts which emphasise individuals’ independence and freedom to choose and control their own learning.

Holec (1981) defines autonomy as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning” (p. 3). Although, after Holec, a number of researchers have attempted to define learner autonomy (e.g., Little 1991, Dam 1995, Littlewood 1997, and Benson 2001)<sup>1</sup>, most researchers in the field of

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<sup>1</sup> Little (1991: 4) argues, “autonomy is a capacity – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning.” Dam (1995:1) describes that learner

learner autonomy share the concept that learner autonomy is learners' ability/capacity to control their own learning.

It seems that the literature of learner autonomy originally started as the emphasis of the individual view of learning due the origin of the study of learner autonomy. As I have described above, the early studies on learner autonomy are closely related to the concept of self-directed learning in adult self-learning contexts which emphasise individuals' independence and freedom to choose and control their own learning. Thus, the main concern of the studies on learner autonomy was how an individual learner can be independent and free from the external constraints and researchers tried to identify what autonomous learners should be able to do as Holec (1981) and Little (1991) describe.

As learner autonomy becomes an important aspect of language learning in not only adult self-directed learning but also a variety of other contexts including classroom learning, however, many researchers (e.g, Kohonen 1992, Toohey and Norton 2003, Benson and Cooker 2013) have emphasised the importance of the social views of learning in research on learner autonomy. The individual approaches tend to observe learners without taking contexts in which learners are situated into consideration. Thus, decontextualisation is one of the main limitations in the individual approaches. Oxford (2003) argues that it is important to add social and cultural dimensions to research on autonomy due to the tendency of decontextualisation in the autonomy literature. Oxford (2003: 90) further argues, "future research should combine as many perspectives as possible in any given study". It seems that she adopts the sociocultural perspectives as an 'addition' in order to conquer the problem of decontextualisation that the individual approaches have faced. This would be also one of the main reasons that many researchers adopt social and cultural dimensions to research on learner autonomy.

However, the main problem here is that the dichotomy between the individual and social approaches still exists. Rogoff (1995: 139-140) argues, " Even when the individual and the environment are considered, they are often regarded as separated entities rather than being mutually defined and interdependent in ways that preclude their separation as units or elements". In short, in the literature of learner autonomy, many researchers are aware of the fact that we need to look at both individuals and social and cultural influence on them. However, they tend to just put together a variety of perspectives as a mosaic rather than finding a way to "live in the middle (Holquist 1994, cited in Wertsch 1998)" of different perspectives. Sociocultural theory will provide us with a response to this issue.

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autonomy "is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's own needs and purposes." "Littlewood (1997) creates a three-stage model of autonomy, which consists of dimensions of language acquisition, learning approach, and personal development. In the dimension of language acquisition, autonomy is related to "an ability to operate independently with the language and use it to communicate personal meaning in real, unpredictable situations" (Littlewood 1997: 81). In the dimension of learning approach, it is concerned with learners' "ability to take responsibility for their own learning and to apply active, personally relevant strategies" (Littlewood 1997: 81). Finally, in the dimension of personal development, autonomy is related with "a higher-level goal of ... greater generalised autonomy as individuals" (Littlewood 1997: 81). Benson (2001: 47) defines autonomy as "the capacity to take control of one's own learning" while indicating at least three levels of control (learning management, cognitive processes, and learning content) should be recognised in terms of the development of autonomy in language learning.

### **3. Sociocultural theory**

The Russian Psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues and followers develop sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind. SCT has offered a number of unique perspectives to not only psychology but also many other disciplines including second/foreign language acquisition and pedagogy. SCT is often understood as one of the prominent representatives of social approaches due to at least partially the name, 'sociocultural'. SCT is often regarded that it emphasises exclusively on social and cultural dimensions of language learning. It is true that SCT indicates the essentiality of social and cultural dimensions of language learning. However, it is also true that SCT does not omit the importance of individuality.

Some scholars such as Evensen (2007) actually question the argument that Vygotsky's SCT replaces individual approaches to language learning with social ones. Vygotsky is primarily interested in how 'individuals' learn and develop through social interaction. As Evensen (2007: 336) indicates, in SCT "learning moves from the intermental to the intramental, from between persons to within persons". This internalisation allows individuals to control their higher psychological processes. In other words, internalisation is the reconstruction on the inner, psychological plane, of socially mediated external forms of goal-directed behaviour (Lantolf 2000: 13). Internalisation allows an individual to regulate his/her own goal-directed behaviour.

SCT primarily uses a dialectic unity between seemingly separating elements to understand human psychological functions. Thus, separating between the individual and social perspectives or emphasising only one of them and treating another as a supplement does not provide us with better understanding of language learning including learner autonomy. SCT's emphasis on the mutuality of the individual and the sociocultural environment is associated with the concern with finding a unit of analysis that contains the essence of the events of interest rather than separating an event into elements which no longer function as does the whole (Rogoff 1995: 140). If human actions are almost always sociocultural, it is incomplete to emphasise either individual attributes or social and cultural influence. Instead, it is necessary to focus on the relationship between individual development and social interaction with concern for the cultural activity in which personal and interpersonal actions take places (Rogoff 1995: 140). Through the dialectic unity between individuality and sociocultural dimensions using the concept of mediation, SCT provides us with a new perspective on learner autonomy.

### **4. Sociocultural theory and learner autonomy**

According to Lantolf (2013: 18) who is one of the prominent SCT scholars, "the term 'autonomy' is not referenced in the SCT literature and it is certainly not a central concept of the theory". Instead, the SCT literature often uses another term, 'agency', to describe autonomous characteristics of language learners (e.g., Wretch et al 1993; van Lier 2008). Benson (2007: 30) also indicates that agency and identity are the key concepts which create links between SCT and the theory of autonomy. Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001: 145) argue that as agents, "learners actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning". In this sense, agency and autonomy are very similar concepts, if not the same, because 'constructing the terms and conditions of their learning' in their definition of agency could be the same as 'taking charge or control of one's own learning' in the prominent definitions of autonomy.

SCT scholars and scholars in the field of learner autonomy, however, conceptualise agency differently. According to Lantolf (2013), the concept of agency in western social sciences is based on Locke’s notion of the individual as a solipsistic and sovereign entity capable of acting independently. This idea is also similar to one of the main reasons to start the research on autonomy which was influenced by the emerging field of adult self-directed learning insisting on the need to develop the individual’s freedom and independence. Here, language learners are often described as “individuals who act, think, and learn in accordance with innate, specifiable characteristics, independently of the social, historical, cultural and political-economic situations in which they live” (Toohey and Norton 2003: 58). Thus, the agency here is associated with individuality, independence, and freedom from external constraints. ‘An-individual-acting-independently’ is the individual agent in these notions.

SCT considers that the individual agent is “a social being whose individuality rests on, and is derived from, social relationships, culturally organised activities, and use of artifacts” (Lantolf 2013: 18). The social is the ‘source’ of the individual (Leontiev 1978: 32) rather than peripherally influencing the individual. While citing Vygotsky’s (1987) concept, Lantolf (2013: 18) argues:

[A]lthough we are biological beings endowed with specific mental capacities (memory, attention, perception, reflexes) passed on through the genetic endowment inherited from our ancestors, we also inherited a cultural endowment from our ancestors passed on (i.e. internalised) through participation in social relationships and cultural activities.

In SCT, physical as well as psychological functions of human beings are socially and culturally mediated and therefore it makes us fundamentally sociocultural beings. According to SCT, as Figure 1 describes, people (subject) do not act directly on the physical world (object) but rather rely on culturally constructed artifacts (mediational means) such as physical tools, symbolic tools, and signs (e.g., language), which allow us to change the world (Lantolf 2000).

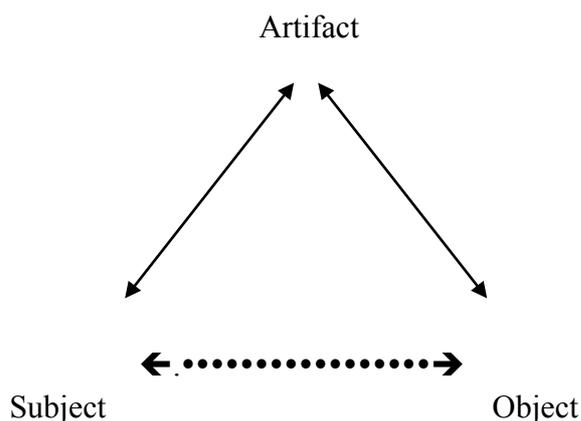


Figure 1. The mediate nature of human/world relationship (Lantolf and Thorne 2006: 62)

Drawing directly on Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, Leont’ev (1981: 208) also emphasises the importance of mediated processes of action:

...a feature of the labour process is that it is performed in conditions of joint, collective activity, so that man functions in this process not only in a certain relationship with

nature but also to other people, members of a given society. Only through a relation with other people does man relate to nature itself, which means that labour appears from the very beginning as a process mediated by tools (in the broad sense) and at the same time mediated socially (cited in Engestrom and Miettinen, 1999: 4).

The idea that “the human mind is *mediated*” (Lantolf, 2000: 1, italics in original) suggests the developmental processes of higher psychological functions.

While using the concept of mediation as the central source of higher psychological functions, Wertsch et al (1993) and Wertsch (1998) describe an appropriate designation of agent as ‘an-individual-operating-with-mediational-means’. These concepts imply, “In the absence of mediation there would in fact no human individuals, although there might be human organisms, as for instance occurs in cases of feral children” (Lantolf 2013: 19). In short, individuals essentially need mediation to develop agency, and by implication, autonomy as well. In this perspective, agency is understood as the individual’s “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001: 112). Thus, as a working definition, learner autonomy is also the individual learner’s socioculturally mediated capacity. While focusing on mediation, the next section will analyse data collected in a Japanese language classroom in order to examine how learners are actually taking control of their own learning in the classroom.

## **5. Interpersonal relationships as mediational means in the Japanese language classroom**

The data shown in this section come from the second semester of a beginning-level Japanese language course at an Australian university. The data was collected in a tutorial class of the Japanese language course, which consisted of lectures, tutorials, and seminars, during a 13-week semester. 23 learners enrolled in the tutorial class. In order to collect the data, I conducted observation of the Japanese language classroom with video and audio recording and interviews with learners and teachers (Week 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13). The following analysis will focus on a relationship between a learner named ‘Pi’<sup>2</sup> and his classmates in the tutorial.

Pi is a second-year student whose major is Architectural Studies at the university. He is an international student from China and his first language is Cantonese. He is interested in Japanese culture so he started enrolling in a Japanese language course at the university. He has never studied Japanese before enrolling in the Japanese language course at the university. His goal for learning Japanese is to manage to speak and write Japanese very well and to become a confident Japanese language user. He is also interested in living and studying in Japan for further education after finishing his undergraduate degree in Australia.

In the tutorial, tables in the classroom were arranged as Figure 2 describes. In Figure 2, ‘WB’ indicates a whiteboard in front of the classroom and ‘① to ⑥’ shows where the learners tended to sit at the tables. The table arrangement would help the learners to interact with each other in small groups or pairs.

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<sup>2</sup> All learners’ names are pseudonyms in this article.

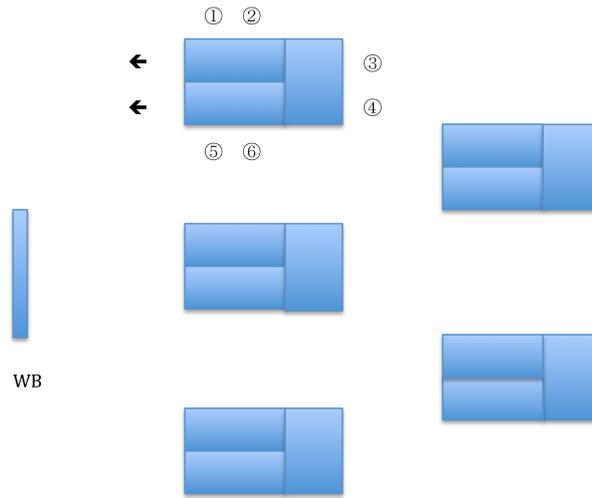


Figure 2. Table arrangement in the tutorial

Table 1 indicates with whom Pi took a seat at the same table. On Week 3, 5, 7, 9 and 13, learners were able to choose their seats. However, the teacher decided where each learner should take a seat on Week 11. The teacher wanted to give the learners an opportunity to interact with different classmates. In the Week 11 interview, when I asked the reason why she decided the learners' seating places, the teacher responded, "*Chotto seki ga kotee ni natte, sono hito shika hanasanai mitaina kanji o uketa node, ironna hito to hanasu kikai ga atte iika to omoimashita*<sup>3</sup> [I thought that it would be good to have an opportunity to talk to a variety of classmates because the learners' seating places had been fixed and the learners tended to talk to the same classmates]". Thus, on Week 11, Pi sat at a table with classmates he was not familiar with.

	Sitting with whom at the same table?	Remark
Week 3	Pi, Apple, Grape, Orange <sup>4</sup>	
Week 5	Pi, Apple, Grape, Kiwi, Melon, Banana	
Week 7	Pi, Kiwi, Melon, Tomato, Mango	
Week 9	Pi, Apple, Grape, Kiwi, Banana, Plum	
Week 11	Pi, Peach, Blueberry, Orange	The teacher decided where the learners sat.
Week 13	Pi, (Kiwi)	Because the first half of the class was a test, all learners sat alone. Later, Pi and Kiwi worked together in a pair activity.

Table 1. Seating allocation in the classroom

<sup>3</sup> Japanese words and expressions will be written in italics in this article.

<sup>4</sup> The names of fruits are learners in the tutorial.

As Table 1 shows, Pi tended to sit with almost the same classmates during the semester if he could choose with whom he was able to sit at the same table. It is very reasonable that if the learners had friends in the classrooms, they tended to sit together with the friends at the same table. If the learners did not have any friends in the classrooms, they returned to the same seats (or near the same seats) that they sat last week. Thus, the learners tended to sit together with almost the same people during the semester.

When the semester started, Pi did not know any classmates well in the tutorial which consisted of 23 students although he recognised a classmate, Melon, from the last semester. In the Week 3 interview, when I asked him if he had any friends in the tutorial, Pi mentioned, “Tutorial... not really. I have only one classmate [Melon] I used to be in the same class... last semester... He sat at another table, another desk, so... Yeah, most of students, I didn't see them in the last semester”. However, he began to become friends with Grape, Apple and Kiwi. In the Week 9 interview, when I asked what Pi and some of his classmates who sat at the same table with him were talking about before the class started, Pi indicated that “I start making friends with the classmates and then she [Grape] posts something on Facebook and then I was just asking what's happening...” and “I'm a friend with the... huh Grape and Apple and Kiwi... like the [people] sit around...”

In the end of semester, he developed a good interpersonal relationship with Grape, Apple, and Kiwi as he said in the Week 13 interview, “It's [The relationship with the classmates is] quite good actually. Huh, we are planning to do 2A [the Japanese 2A course] ...So, I think it's huh well good thing that I am start[ing] making friends. In huh so I have huh friends who are learning Japanese with me”. Thus, Pi had developed a good interpersonal relationship with some classmates such as Grape, Apple, and Kiwi in the tutorial.

The following dialogue (Dialogue 1) is part of an interaction sequence between Pi and some of his classmates who sat at the same table with him during the Week 9 tutorial. In this interaction sequence, they are checking answers for the dictation exercise<sup>5</sup> in a group.

#### Dialogue 1

- 1) Banana: *Abura o... Abura o...* (Oil... Oil...)
- 2) Pi: *Abura ga ooi.* (It literally means ‘oil is a lot’ which indicates oily as oily foods)
- 3) Banana: *Abura ga ooi.* (Oily.)
- 4) Learners: (Inaudible due to many learners talked to each other at the same time.)
- 5) Kiwi: *Moto shì běn de yì sī shì běn sè* (in Chinese). (The Japanese *kanji* character for *Moto* is *běn* in Chinese which meaning is original [colour].)
- 6) Pi: *Moto shì běn* (in Chinese). (*Moto* is *běn*.)
- 7) Pi: *Ie.* What's *ie*, *kanji* for *ie*? (*Ie* means ‘house’ in English. He is asking how to write the Japanese *kanji* character for *ie*.)

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<sup>5</sup> There were three questions and the correct answers were as follows: 1) 家本さんのお子さんは、目が大きくて、かみがくろくて、とてもかわいいです。 (*Iemoto-san no oko-san wa, me ga ookikute, kami ga kurokute, totemo kawaii desu.*) 2) 私の二番目の姉は、せがあまり高くないので、大ていハイヒールのくつをはいています。 (*Watashi no nibanme no ane wa, se ga amari takakunai node, taitei haihiiru no kutsu o haiteimasu.*) 3) 弟は、あぶらがおいりょうりは、好きじゃありませんから、きのうレストランですしとおちやをちゅうもんしました。 (*Otouto wa, abura ga ooi ryouri wa, sukijaarimasen kara, kinou resutoran de sushi to ocha o chuumonshimashita.*)

8) Apple: Ah... It's like this... (She is writing the *kanji* character of *ie* in the air.)

In the line 1, Banana was struggling to figure out an expression, *abura ga ooi*, so Pi advised her how to say the expression. Then, Kiwi and Pi were confirming that the Japanese *kanji* character, 本 (*moto*), is the same as a Chinese character, 本 (*běn*) in the line 5 and 6. Then, Pi asked everyone in the table what the *kanji* character for *ie* and one of the classmates, Apple, tried to explain the character. The important point here is that Pi was interacting with other learners to find out correct answers for dictation exercises. These interaction sequences were possible because Pi had built an interpersonal relationship with the learners.

Dialogue 2 describes the same dictation exercise on Week 11. The teacher asked the learners to check answers<sup>6</sup> in groups. The interaction sequence was all conversation taking place between Pi and the learners who sat at the same table with him during the time of checking answers. After a moment of silence, Pi suddenly asked the learners at the same table a question regarding the Japanese *kanji* character for *tsuyoi* (which means 'strong' in English) and one of them, Peach, responded to his question.

## Dialogue 2

- 1) Pi: *Tsuyo*... Have we learned the *kanji* for *tsu*... *tsuyoi*?
- 2) Peach: Ah... I don't think so.

After this interaction sequence, Pi and the learners did not have any interaction. On Week 11, because the teacher allocated each learner's place to take a seat, the learners had to interact with those classmates whom they were not familiar with. In the Week 11 interview, Pi indicated, "Huh, well, the thing is... now the seats were arranged. Like, we are told to where we sit. So, huh, the people sat around me... I don't know them. So, it's a bit weird. Cause... when we have to practice, huh, I don't know how to huh talk to them". Pi and the classmates who occupied a table with him on Week 11 had not built a good interpersonal relationship with each other during the semester and thus it was difficult for them to make collaborative interaction in the dictation exercise.

## 6. Discussion

On Week 9, Pi knew how to interact with his classmates who sat at the same table with him because most of them were his friends. He was taking control of his Japanese language learning process while utilising the interaction with his classmates as an artifact. His capacity to take charge of his learning did not stay only within himself but it went beyond himself.

In our lives, it is extremely rare that we have to deal with things without interacting with anyone and/or anything. We are able to use a variety of artifacts to deal with things. Our capacity to deal with things largely depends on what kinds of artifacts are available to us and how we use

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<sup>6</sup> There were two questions and the correct answers were as follows: 1) ロングウイークエンドになにをしましたか。(Rongu uiikuendo ni nani o shimashita ka.) 2) きのうのばんは、かぜがつよくて、つめたかったの、ジャケットをきました。(Kinou no ban wa, kaze ga tsuyokute, tsumetakatta node, jaketto o kimashita.)

them in a given situation. In classrooms, we often try to isolate each learner to determine his/her capacity/ability. We tend to consider that a learner does not have an enough capacity/ability if the learner seeks advice from other learners and/or teachers. This is because we view one's capacity/ability belongs to only the individual person.

On Week 9, while collaborating with other learners at the same table, Pi was able to construct the correct answers in Japanese during the dictation exercise. However, on Week 11, Pi had some mistakes in his dictation answers which were corrected by the teacher who walked around the classroom. He was probably not sure about some part of his answers but he was not able to ask questions to other learners at the same table except the *kanji* for *tsuyoi*. He tried to finish checking whether his answers were correct or not as he did not do anything for a couple of minutes after the brief interaction with Peach. Then, the teacher approached Pi and indicated that there were some mistakes in his answers. From this fact, it will be possible to say that on Week 11 Pi was not able to take control of his learning process well in the dictation exercise as he almost gave up finding correct answers if the teacher did not approach him. Actually, after the teacher left him, he wanted to ask more questions. Instead of asking the learners at the same table, he was waiting for the teacher who was talking to another learner at a different table. When the teacher came close to his table again, he raised his hand and called the teacher to ask further questions. It seems that he did not have any more intention to interact with the learners at the same table.

In terms of taking control of his Japanese language learning in the classroom, it would be argued that Pi were more capable on Week 9 compared to Week 11 (until the teacher approached him) because his capacity was multiplied by the collaborative interaction with the learners.<sup>7</sup> The capacity to take control of one's learning is almost always socioculturally mediated. Pi's capacity to take control of his Japanese language learning in the classroom is reified more clearly when we analyse and understand interpersonal relationships and collaborative interaction with the learners and teacher in the classroom.

The following formulas describe 1) a traditional perspective which views learner autonomy as an individual learner's internal ability/capacity and 2) a SCT perspective which conceptualises learner autonomy as an individual learner's socioculturally mediated capacity.

1) Traditional Perspective:

Learner Autonomy = A Learner's Internal Capacity (+ Social and Cultural Influence)

2) SCT Perspective:

Learner Autonomy = A Learner's Socioculturally Mediated Capacity = A Learner x Artifacts

On one hand, the traditional perspective describes that learner autonomy is the ability/capacity that a learner already possesses internally. It also mentions that the learner's ability/capacity may be influenced by social and cultural factors. On the other hand, the SCT perspective indicates that learner autonomy is the capacity which is reified by mediational relationships between a learner and artifacts. In this formula, artifacts are always necessary because anything is multiplied by zero will be zero. Thus, without artifacts, a learner cannot have any capacity to take control of one's own learning.

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<sup>7</sup> Not only quantity but also quality of interaction will be important.

The SCT perspective argues that the capacity belongs to not only individual learners but also their engagement with artifacts. This point implies that a learner's capacity to take control of one's own learning will change in accordance with what artifacts the learner uses and how the learner utilises them. In short, learner autonomy can be conceptualised as the learner's socioculturally mediated capacity to take control of one's own learning.

## **7. Conclusion**

As most fields in language learning have faced the dichotomy between the individual and the social, the field of learner autonomy also contains the dichotomous view to analyse and understand learner autonomy. In order to understand learner autonomy, it is necessary to look for approaches which view a dialectic unity between the individual and social views. SCT based on the concept of mediation is one of the approaches which have a potential to provide us with a different way to conceptualise learner autonomy. As described above, learners' capacity to take control of their own learning is associated with how they create interpersonal relationships with their classmates. For the learners, interpersonal relationships in the classroom work as mediational means to engage with their own learning. Human capacity is almost always mediated by artifacts. Thus, learner autonomy is the learner's socioculturally mediated capacity to take control of one's learning.

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### **About the Author**

**Tetsushi Ohara** is a PhD candidate in Japanese language pedagogy at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). His research interests include designs of classroom activities, learner autonomy and learner agency, and application of sociocultural theory to Japanese language education. In his PhD thesis, he is attempting to conceptualise learner autonomy using sociocultural theory. He also has been an instructor of Japanese language at UNSW and language schools in Sydney. He is a recipient of the University International Postgraduate Award Scholarship (2010-2013) and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Dean's Student Leadership Award (2012) at UNSW.