Critical Thinking: What it means in a Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Context

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New Challenges, New Strategies, and New Prospects in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Table of Contents

Foreword

This May 2022 edition of English as a Foreign Language International Journal (EFLIJ), three research articles bear witness to the resiliency of EFL teachers in carrying their tasks of promoting English pedagogy in their respective workplaces while the worldwide pandemic, COVID-19, remains to challenge their efficient, relevant, and innovative delivery of language instruction.

In the first article, *Critical Thinking: What it means in a Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Context,* Thi Thanh Binh Nguyen discusses how Vietnamese EFL teachers and students interpret critical thinking. This qualitative study involved 8 teachers and 22 students who articulated some of the features of involved cognitive skills in critical thinking (analysing, synthesising, and evaluating) and affective dispositions (inquisitiveness and open-mindedness). The study shows how research participants had rudimentarily conceptualized critical thinking that can be traced in their local culture. Further, the study indicates that the participant Vietnamese teachers and students viewed critical thinking primarily within the concept of knowledge and self and not in terms of global perspective. As a result, the study has identified a learning gap that can be narrowed by providing training programmes or workshops to address the three components of critical thinking according to Barnett's (1997) and Bloom's (1956) models.

In the second article, *Grit as a Predictor of Foreign Language Proficiency: An Investigation of Grit and EFL Proficiency in Japanese University Students*, Jared R. Baierschmidt addresses the challenges of Japanese EFL learners in engaging even in simple English conversations. To address their need, the researcher used a non-cognitive trait of grit as predictor of EFL learning outcomes among local university students in eastern Japan. Using both demographic information and scores in TOEIC, TOEFL, and current GPA in a regression analysis, the data have shown a positive correlation between grit and English proficiency test scores. Also, the study has confirmed scarcity of studies that show relationship between grit and foreign language proficiency, though there had been findings for the said purpose in education, the military, and work performance. To address the need, the demographic information and standardized test scores of 280 Japanese university students were explored using regression analysis. Baierschmidt found grit to be statistically significant to a certain degree. In addition, he acknowledges that the results need to be verified by further studies with much bigger population size of respondents.

In the last article, *Application of Metapragmatics to Language-Learning Research: A Longitudinal Study of Word Learning in Language Exchange Conversations,* Jiwon Lee has proposed the use of metapragmatics in SLA research. In this study, the researcher analyzed word learning during a four-month period of language exchange conversation between two native and two-non-native Japanese speakers. The results of the study indicate the potentials of metapragmatics in understanding the reflective and social nature of language learning.

In the context of varied global challenges brought by COVID-19, EFLIJ is optimistic that more EFL practitioners will continue to address the uncharted areas of English language pedagogy, both locally and globally.

(Guest Editor) **Dr Xiuping Li, Ulster University, UK**
(Co-guest Editor) **Dr I-Chin Nonie Chiang, National Open University, Taiwan**
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Critical Thinking: What it means in a Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Context

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Abstract

Although research has ascribed a number of virtues to critical thinking, what critical thinking means is itself open to debate. This paper, as a part of a larger qualitative study on critical thinking practice in a Vietnamese EFL context, presents the findings about how Vietnamese EFL teachers and students in a university interpreted critical thinking. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers and 22 students in a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context to seek their understandings of critical thinking. A majority of the interviews (28) were conducted in Vietnamese, then transcribed in their entirety, and translated into English. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. The participating teachers and students defined critical thinking as involving cognitive skills (e.g., analysing, synthesising, evaluating) and affective dispositions (e.g., inquisitiveness, open-mindedness). Their understandings were found to be limited to the first two domains of criticality in Barnett's (1997) framework. That is, they understood critical thinking mainly within the domains of "knowledge", less in "self", barely at all in the domain of the "world". The findings further revealed three characteristics distinctive in the participants' conceptions of critical thinking: (i) expressing personal opinions as an indication of critical thinking, (ii) right/wrong dichotomy as the aim of critical thinking, and (iii) others' rather than one's own opinions or arguments as the subject of criticism. The findings imply that the participating teachers and students appeared to have quite a rudimentary grasp of critical thinking and that their understandings were influenced to some extent by the Vietnamese culture of teaching and learning, which has some implications for the application of critical thinking in an EFL context.

Key words: critical thinking, definition, EFL, Vietnamese culture

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1. Introduction

Critical thinking has variously been appreciated as an aim of education (Dewey, 1933; Elder & Paul, 2003; Paul, 2005), the primary reason for higher education (Halpern, 1999), or the educational aim of higher education (Barnett, 1997). During the 21st century, critical thinking became a focus in the field of

second and foreign language (L2) education. Many scholars have acknowledged its important role in language education (see Alagozlu, 2007; Alnofaie, 2013; Asraf, Ahmed, & Eng, 2018; Brumfit, Myles, Mitchell, Johnston, & Ford, 2005; Gunawardena & Petraki, 2014; Houghton & Yamada, 2012; Kabilan, 2000; Mok, 2010; Richard, 2003; Yuan & Stapleton 2019). Brumfit et al. (2005) claim that critical thinking helps language students communicate in a new language, produce various types of spoken and written language, and demonstrate creativity when using a foreign language. Apart from the benefits of linguistic competence, critical thinking is believed by some to facilitate social justice (Pessoa & Urzêda Freitas, 2012). A critical approach to language learning enables students to be cognisant of oppression and to learn how to fight against it (Norton & Toohey, 2004).

Despite being an essential skill in today's era, what 'critical thinking' means is itself open to debate. Researchers in Western contexts (e.g., Facione, 2011; Lloyd & Bahr, 2010; Moore, 2013), where critical thinking is believed to be a cultural product (Atkinson, 1997) have found critical thinking is neither clearly nor commonly understood. The meaning of critical thinking in the contexts where the practice thereof has been observed less frequently such as Turkey, China or Japan has also been investigated (e.g., Chen, 2017; Howe, 2004), and the findings also revealed the vagueness in the definitions of this concept. The vague understanding of critical thinking was claimed to influence EFL classroom instructional practices as teachers' pedagogical beliefs closely affect their teaching, decision-making and classroom interaction (Li, 2016). As more and more attention has been paid to developing this skill in EFL field, research on teachers and students' understanding of critical thinking in a EFL classroom will help stakeholders in this field identify the guiding principles in relation to their classroom work.

It has been argued that critical thinking might be defined differently in different cultures. Howe (2004) who sought a comparative conceptualisation of critical thinking between Canadian and Japanese teachers found that the Canadian participants tended to relate critical thinking to the cognitive domain (higher-order thinking, evaluating assumptions, and rational thinking) whereas the Japanese participants focused on affective domain (being consistent, objective, and fair). These could be seen to represent the 'Western, empirical' attitude and the 'Eastern, face-saving, harmony-building' approaches, respectively. In a study on Chinese students' critical thinking, Tan (2013) concludes that critical thinking practised in China has its own characteristics, which she alludes to as the 'Chinese-style critical thinking'. It may thus be suggested that critical thinking is understood and practised differently in different cultures. Although some research has been done to discover the impact of Asian teachers and students' social, cultural and educational backgrounds their understanding of critical thinking (e.g., Chen, 2017), little is known about the Vietnamese EFL context.

Informed by the significance of teachers and students' conceptions of critical thinking to their practice of this competence, and the identified gap in the literature, a study on the Vietnamese EFL teachers and students' understanding of critical thinking will help cover how the participants in this context define critical thinking. This study is of more importance as EFL teachers and students need to

be able to define and articulate the meaning of critical thinking to promote this skill in their classrooms (Yuan & Stapleton, 2019).

2. Literature review

2.1. Approaches to critical thinking

Critical thinking as reflective thinking

The concept of critical thinking can be traced back at least to John Dewey's (1933) book How we think. Dewey defined critical thinking as 'reflective thinking … an active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends' (p. 9). For Dewey, critical thinking was essentially an active process, one in which people consider and evaluate matters, raise questions, and access and examine information themselves. He contrasted it with the kind of thinking in which a person passively receives ideas and information. When defining critical thinking as persistent and careful, Dewey contrasted it with what he called unreflective thinking. In his view, critical thinking is a subset of a reflective process involving thorough assessment, scrutiny and the drawing of conclusions pertinent to the issue at hand. Finally, in this conception of critical thinking, what matters are the rationales people apply in forming their views, and the sources, validity and implications of their beliefs. Dewey's idea of reflective thinking is seen as an early conceptualisation of critical thinking (Buranapatana, 2006).

While Dewey's views may be considered revolutionary, ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle also advocated the idea of reflective thinking. Weil (2004, p. 414) posits that the inner-Socratic spirit is to take seriously the voices of others: 'what they think, how they form their beliefs, and how their ideas might be tested relative to what they are thinking'. Socrates questioned not only others' beliefs but also his own. He recognised the limits of others' knowledge and of his own (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

Reflective thinking has also been found in Confucius' philosophies (Kim, 2003; Leung & Kember, 2003). Lee (1996, in Leung & Kember, 2003) cited Confucius to substantiate his argument that reflective thinking is to be found in the Confucian tradition:

> While there is anything that he has not reflected on, or anything which he has reflected on which he does not apprehend, he will not intermit his labour. While there is anything which he has not discriminated, or his discrimination is not clear, he will not intermit his labour. If there be anything which he has not practiced, or his practice fails in earnestness, he will not intermit his labour. (p. 35)

According to Confucius, a person will/should not rest until he understands something, or they should never cease in their quest for understanding.

Reflective thinking in Confucius' view, according to Kim (2003), involves the reflection on the substance of knowledge, and the reflection on oneself. Nevertheless, it appears that critical thinking has a stronger tradition from the West than from the East.

A two- or bi-dimensional conceptualisation of critical thinking

The two-dimensional conceptualisation of critical thinking with its cognitive and dispositional aspects is discussed widely in the literature. The cognitive aspect of critical thinking has been associated with the mental capability to comprehend a problem, and the ability to make sound judgments and to arrive at rational decisions. A critically literate person is assumed capable of employing critical thinking skills in reasoning about real-world situations and problems. Among the models of critical thinking skills (e.g., Bloom, 1956; Ennis, 1987; Paul, 1990), Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of the cognitive domain has been used to characterise critical thinking skills (e.g., Dumteeb, 2009; Waters, 2006).

Bloom's original taxonomy comprises six levels, which are used to identify a learner's progress from lower order to higher order thinking through: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This taxonomy of cognitive domain attempts to establish a sequential and cumulative hierarchy depicting the stages of learning and thinking from the most elementary to the most complex. Bloom's (1956) taxonomy was revised by Anderson, Krathwohl, and Bloom (2001). The higher-order thinking processes in Bloom's (1956) taxonomy have been identified as critical thinking skills (Dumteeb, 2009; Ennis, 1987) and used as the conceptual framework in several studies on critical thinking in education (e.g. Dong, 2006; Dumteeb, 2009; Surjosuseno & Watts, 1999). However, Ennis (1987, 1993), for whom critical thinking does not equate to the application of higher-order thinking skills, has argued that the concept of higher order levels is too vague and not accompanied by criteria for judging critical thinking assessment.

A critical thinker needs not only cognitive skills and abilities but also the readiness and preparedness to use those skills in appropriate contexts (Halpern, 1999). As opposed to cognitive skills, which pertain to reasoning and logical thinking (Siegel, 1999), critical dispositions are seen as the motivational and intentional aspects of critical thinking (Ennis, 1985; Halpern, 2001). Siegel (1999) describes a 'critical spirit' (p. 79) as the inclination or disposition to think critically on a regular basis in a wide range of circumstances. Passmore (1972, in Kennedy, Fisher, & Ennis, 1991) suggests that critical disposition is like a character trait made evident by a willingness to call things into question. In discussing the teaching of critical thinking, Halpern (1967, in Hemming, 2000) claims that it is inadequate to teach college students the skills of critical thinking if they are not inclined to use them.

The combination of cognitive skills and dispositions in critical thinking is prevalent in numerous definitions of critical thinking by seminal theorists in the field such as Ennis (1987), Browne and Keeley (1998, in Browne & Freeman, 2000), and Halpern (Halpern 1999). Browne and Keeley (1998, in Browne & Freeman, 2000, p. 302) state that 'critical thinking focuses on a set of skills and attitudes that enables a listener or reader to apply rational criteria to the reasoning of speakers and writers'. The bi-dimensional definition of critical thinking has also been conceptualised by Black (2005, p. 7) as the analytical thinking which requires an open-minded yet critical approach to one's own thinking as well as that of others.

Weak and strong senses of critical thinking

Paul (1992, p. 9) distinguishes two forms of critical thinking: weak and strong. A weak sense of critical thinking is identified when skills are used to detect mistakes in others' thinking. A weak sense critical thinker uses thinking to defend one's own understanding, convincing others that their own point of view is correct or superior. The classification of critical thinking into its weak and strong manifestations is also evident in Browne and Keeley's (2007) work. For Browne and Keeley (2007), a weak sense of critical thinking refers to a method for defending initial beliefs, while critical thinking in its strong sense requires us to apply critical questions to all claims, including one's own. Gieve's (1998) definition of critical thinking– defending and questioning oneself – shares the thoughts by Paul' (1992) and Browne and Keeley's (2007). According to Gieve (1998, p. 126), critical thinkers

> examine the reasons for their actions, their beliefs and their knowledge claims, requiring them to defend themselves and question themselves, their peers, their teachers, experts and authoritative texts, both in class and in writing.

Resource approach to critical thinking

Critical thinking has been discussed in terms of associated resources for critical thinking development by some critical thinking scholars including Bailin, Case, Coombs and Daniels (1999a) and Johnston, Ford, Myles and Mitchell (2011). Bailin et al. (1999b) characterise critical thinkers with regard to intellectual resources, including background knowledge, operational knowledge of the standards of good thinking, knowledge of key critical concepts, knowledge of heuristic devices and habits of mind. Incorporating Bailin et al.'s (1999b) intellectual resources and Barnett's (1997) three domains of criticality (see more at the next section), Johnston et al. (2011) extend the notion of resources to the domains of not only 'knowledge' but also of the 'self' and the 'world'. They maintain that the resources need to be critical across the three domains, and to involve distinctive types of knowledge and certain personal qualities and values.

The resource approach to critical thinking is useful in understanding the intellectual resources for critical thinking to occur; however, it is criticised for not explaining the relationship between resources and the social and cultural background of students (Johnston et al., 2011). Certain students may have access to more resources or social capital than others by virtue of their personal and socio-economic circumstances.

Critical being

The existing understandings and diverse definitions of critical thinking proposed by many researchers and educators are critiqued by Ronald Barnett. Barnett (1997) proposes that higher education should develop students as critical persons. This view was reiterated in his recent book chapter, 'A curriculum for critical being', in Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education, edited by Martin Davies and Ronald Barnett (2015). Barnett (1997) argues that critical persons are more than just critical thinkers.

Critical persons are 'able to critically engage with the world, with knowledge and with themselves' (Barnett, 1997, p. 1). Barnett (1997) identifies the levels of criticality ranging from critical thinking skills, critical thought to critique. Critical thinking skills involve a set of cognitive skills. They can be context-specific or context-independent, that is, discipline-specific or generic skills. Apart from the skills, students are expected to be aware of their own understanding of the topics they are addressing. Barnett (1997, p. 71) sees this reflexivity or 'meta-critical capacity' as fundamental to critical thinking whereby the student understands that all knowledge claims, including his/her own, have elements of openness and contestability. Critical thought is a higher level of criticality than critical skills because it is an attribute of a body of thought. It relates to the contestability within a discipline or intellectual field. By the same token, critique operates outside the conventions of the discipline itself. For Barnett (1997), the goal of study for higher education should not only be to encourage students to attain profound knowledge about what they are learning, or to encourage them to learn about their world and learn about themselves, but to encourage them to develop themselves and contribute to the world. Criticality, therefore, assumes forms of critical reason, critical self-reflection and critical action.

Critical thinking framework

Existing studies of critical thinking practices in specific educational context have employed various critical thinking frameworks adopting cognitive and dispositional approaches, as previously outlined. As these frameworks offer taxonomies which help to map out the 'territory' (McGuinness 2005, p. 109), they have proven useful in the areas of development and instruction (Johnston et al., 2011). The view of critical thinking as a set of cognitive skills and dispositions only, however, cannot adequately reflect the objectives and purposes with which critical thinking can engage. Barnett's (1997) domains of criticality were adopted as a means of filling this gap. According to Barnett (1997), criticality should be understood over a range of domains (knowledge, self, and world). Domains are understood as the objects that critical thinking can target and the purposes that it can target (Barnett, 1997, 2015). Drawing on Barnett's (1997) domains of criticality, the domains in the EFL field can be interpreted as follows:

- the world of knowledge: linguistic system of English language, theories in socio-cultural aspects of English language, theories in English language teaching and learning, etc.
- the world of oneself: the reflection of EFL learners on their own language, culture (Vietnamese), language learning process or strategies, and their personal biases, presumptions, blind spots, etc.
- the world of the outside: socio-cultural aspects of the people who use English as their mother tongue or those whom EFL learners contact in English, the use of English as a means to attain certain purposes in life (e.g., to avoid miscommunication), socio-cultural problems or issues of the (English-speaking) world, etc.

In this study, critical thinking is defined as a competence which prompts students to use their reasoning in order to interpret and critique received knowledge, to question their own understanding and assumption(s), and then to take corresponding action. As such, both the potential for good, and the minimisation of harm are seen to inhere to critical thinking. This conception of critical thinking is informed by the combination of Bloom's (1956) and Barnett's (1997) frameworks. In a bid to fulfil its aim to understand the conceptualisations and practices of critical thinking in a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context, the study uses an amalgam of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of cognitive skills and Barnett's (1997) domains of critical thinking, as a new way of understanding the operation of critical thinking.

2.2. Studies on conceptualisations of critical thinking

As claimed by some researchers (e.g., Barnett, 1997; Fox, 1994), academics lacked a clear definition of critical thinking as they did not think critically about this concept. According to Barnett (1997) 'Higher education, which prides itself on critical thought, has done no adequate thinking about critical thinking' (3). In response to this critique, the question of critical thinking conceptualisation has been investigated in a number of empirical research projects in general education (e.g., Baidon & Sim, 2009; Howe, 2000; Loyd & Bahr, 2010; Lun, 2010; Moore, 2013). The participants in these studies had various definitions of critical thinking. For example, Lloyd and Bahr (2010) found that the teachers and students at an Australian university thought critical thinking composed the state of mind or disposition, techniques or processes, and the ability to critique. In a study by Moore (2013), the teachers at his research context defined critical thinking as a set of skills such as judgment, skepticism, simple originality, sensitive readings, rationality, an activist engagement with knowledge and self-reflexivity. Critical thinking, in Lun's (2010) study on Hongkong and New Zealand students, was associated with seeing things beyond face values, effortful process or habits of mind to achieve an outcome. It can be concluded that critical thinking has been defined in a diverse way.

Given increasing importance of critical thinking in EFL contexts, the question of how critical thinking is undertood in these specific settings has also been empirically studied (e.g., Badger, 2019; Dumteeb, 2009; Ketabi et al., 2013; Li, 2016; Ma & Luo, 2020; Saleh, 2019; Stapleton, 2001; Thunnithet, 2011; Yuan & Stapleton, 2019). The studies found diffferent ways that the participants in diffferent EFL contexts understood critical thinking. In Li's (2016) study, for example, the Chinese EFL teachers defined critical thinking as the ability to analyse materials, give summary, see things from different perspectives, discover rules and patterns in language learning, make reasonable argument with evidence and apply language in real-life contexts. Ma and Luo (2020) found that the Chinese pre-service teachers defined critical thinking in terms of a critical thinking process of argumentation with much evidence, and critical thinking results which focus on conclusions drawn from the thinking process. In EFL Columbian context, critical thinking was conceived as a set of cognitive skills (Marin & Pava, 2017). Despite the differences among the studies, they shared one conclusion that the EFL teachers and preservice teachers lacked a limited understanding of what

critical thinking means (Yuan & Stapleton, 2019), or they had a general and vague conceptions of critical thinking (Ketabi et al., 2013).

The studies on critical thinking practices in both general education and English language education show that the teachers and students' social, cultural and educational backgrounds can not only influence their practices of critical thinking but also play an important role in shaping their understanding of critical thinking (Chen, 2017; Ma & Luo, 2020; Moore, 2013; Yuan & Stapleton, 2019). Chen (2017), for instance, found some unique features in her Chinese EFL participants' definitions of critical thinking. One of those unique features is their emphasis that having own opinions different from the authority is crucial to the critical thinking concept. Moreover, the conceptualisation of critical thinking might also depend on disciplinary contexts where it takes place (Abrami et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2011; Jones, 2007; Moore, 2011). For example, Jones (2007), investigated the differences in critical thinking conceptualisations by teachers of Economics and History. Her findings confirm that the epistemology of disciplinary knowledge influences and moderates conceptualisations of critical thinking. For Economics teachers, critical thinking constitutes problem-solving; that is, applying a model to a problem or examining the workings of a model within a particular framework. Meanwhile, teachers of History relate critical thinking to the complex and contested nature of knowledge (Jones 2007). Johnston et al.'s (2011) argue that 'there are general critical dispositions, intellectual (and other) rules, values, qualities and abilities necessary for criticality … but that local manifestations of criticality in the shape of local social practices will differ widely' (p. 72). In the context of classrooms wherein English as a foreign language is used as a medium and object of teaching and learning, the teachers' and students' conceptions of critical thinking in this field are expected to be specific to that field.

Albeit some studies on how critical thinking was conceptualised in different Asian EFL contexts such as mainland China, Taiwan, Hongkong, or Iran, little research has been done in Vietnamese EFL context. A study on Vietnamese EFL tertiary teachers and students' interpretation of critical thinking will contribute to the literature of the field.

3. Methods and materials

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers and 22 students in a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context to seek their understandings of critical thinking. As mentioned in the abstract, the data for this paper were from a bigger study on the practices of critical thinking in a Vietnamese tertiary EFL context. This study was conducted in 2013-2014 academic year. The participants were second- and third-year English majors, and teachers of English at a university of foreign languages in the central region of Vietnam. The participants were asked to define critical thinking in their own words. The researcher (also the interviewer) did not disclose her definition of critical thinking to the participants at any stage of the interviews. Only an equivalent of critical thinking, "tư duy phản biện", was employed when the researcher addressed the question to the

interviewees. A majority of the interviews (28) were conducted in Vietnamese, then transcribed in their entirety, and translated into English.

As the question about the conceptualisation of critical thinking was the begining part of the interview which also aimed to seek the participants' recall of critical thinking practices in their classrooms later on, the interview question about the particiapants' understanding of critical thinking was open-ended and the participants were encouraged to expressed their definition in their own words. The researcher used an additional question to ask the participants to tell an example of critical thinking in their classrooms. This question helped the participants to elicit more ideas to shape their definition of critical thinking.

Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. The researcher listened to the participants' definitions several times before coding. Employing both an inductive and deductive approach (Yin 2009), the themes were identified from the literature about critical thinking definitions (e.g. critical thinking involving cognitive skills or related dispositions, as discussed in section 4). Some themes, however, emerged directly from the data (e.g. critical thinking as a means of expressing personal opinions). The findings about the Vietnamese EFL teachers and students' understanding of critical thinking was further analysed using the conceptual framework of critical thinking in this study.

4. Results

4.1 Critical thinking and the expression of personal opinions

Expressing personal opinions was proposed as an aspect of critical thinking by most of the interviewed participants. In the definitions given by six of the eight teachers, the element of personal voice attracted most mention. As Teacher 5 said:

> I think it's the way that, as a teacher, we can help the students to develop their ability to have a position for any topics so that they can have their own opinions. They must have their own viewpoint to look at a topic and they can develop their ideas. (Teacher 5, I131013)

For Teacher 5, the core concept in critical thinking is personal opinion. She stated that critical thinking had two dimensions – the ability to develop one's own opinions and the ability to discuss other people's viewpoints based on one's own opinions. Other teachers expected critically literate students to develop their own responses to the information they receive. The students should not simply follow what the teacher says. As Teacher 6 explained:

> From the information that they [students] received, no matter from what sources, even [from] the teacher, they need to know how to analyse, synthesise, and adapt for themselves, not just following what the teacher said. (Teacher 6, I51013)

Teacher 1 provided examples of personal voice as follows:

> [You] can agree, disagree, have some inquiries or a different idea, or think of that issue but in a different context to see if it is relevant or not or still applicable or not. (Teacher 1, I13314)

As with the teachers, the student participants emphasised personal opinions in their definitions of critical thinking. Student 20 defined critical thinking as having one's own response to a piece of

information. Student 16 saw listening, understanding and stating for or against opinions as a manifestation of critical thinking. Four other students reported using critical thinking to position and defend their own ideas. Student 19, for example, said: 'Other people may not agree with you but you need to find ways to defend your own thinking.' (Student 19, I7314). To the students, defending one's own thinking seemed to be important in being critical. Student 1, for example, defined critical thinking as 'the way we refute other people's thinking and defend ours' (Student 1, I24214).

In general, the participants said that thinking critically means positioning one's personal standpoint, no matter how negative or positive it is. Their emphasis on expressing personal opinions irrespective of whether they are in opposition to those of a teacher or superior is worthy of attention in the research context. This will be discussed further in Section 5.

4.2 Critical thinking involves cognitive skills

Cognitive skills appeared in all of the interview participants' responses. For both teachers and students, critical thinking is a cognitive process which requires the selection and comparison of different factors or elements (Student 5), comprehensive analysis and evaluation of an issue (Student 8), or the use of evidence to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of an argument (Student 12). One student stressed the role of these skills by affirming that a person was not seen as a critical thinker if they passively accepted some information from others. In a classroom context, the cognitive process may be an evaluation of whether what the teacher or peers say is appropriate or not (Student 7). Student 11 stated: 'When [we] listen to an issue, we use our thinking or knowledge to consider that issue from different perspectives to assess if the speaker is right or wrong' (I5314). Another student considered analysing an opinion in its context to see if it proved acceptable in accordance with Vietnamese social viewpoints or with the Vietnamese ethical norms (Student 15). This raises questions as to who is the arbiter of Vietnamese cultural and ethical norms and how such norms are adjusted. Although Student 15 focused on cognitive skills (analysing), his definition of critical thinking was limited in a sense because it showed a loyalty to a certain set of principles or norms.

As with the students, the teachers saw critical thinking as an ability or process to use cognitive skills in response to a piece of information. Teacher 1 noted: 'In general, it is the ability to analyse, synthesise, evaluate, do research …' (I13314). Teacher 2 defined the use of cognitive skills as the way a person reacts to the information or opinions they encounter; critical thinking means using one's mind to brainstorm ideas, not just accepting a piece of given information. Teacher 2 elaborated: 'A person assesses the extent to which information is correct or incorrect, good or bad, or whether there is anything useful or valuable in that piece of information' (I11314). In general, such assessment involves analysis of what one hears, reads or views. Also stressing this characteristic, Teacher 6 noted that a critical student should be ready to analyse, synthesise or evaluate information regardless of the source of that information, such as teachers or friends. She added adaptation or application as one of the cognitive skills that a critical student should have. She stated: '[you] analyse, synthesise… then apply to your own situation or your own subject, or apply its use in real life' (Teacher 6, I51013). Teacher 3 considered

cognitive skills such as looking at different sources and analysing and synthesising in response to different viewpoints or different things at the same time, to be essential when presenting one's own opinions. This teacher saw it as the highest level of critical thinking (Teacher 3, I101013).

4.3 Evidence – a component of critical thinking

Evidence is highlighted as an important feature in a critical argument. Seven of the 22 interviewed students referred to evidence in their definitions of critical thinking. Student 2, for example, said that critical thinking 'is the ability to oppose another person's idea by using trustworthy evidence' (Student 2, I25214). Two interviewed teachers referred to evidence as an aspect of critical thinking. Teacher 4, who acknowledged the importance of evidence in one's thinking said that she put great emphasis on helping her students to find evidence to support their own answers or opinions.

4.4 Inquisitiveness, curiosity, objectivism, open-mindedness – dispositions of critical thinking

Being inquisitive means not accepting unconditionally what other people say. Instead, according to Student 19, we should ask questions in our minds, or as Student 11 put it, consider from different angles, when assessing whether something is true or not. Student 7 commented: 'In a class, when the teacher or friends present an issue, in every student's mind they will assess if what they have just heard is appropriate or not. It's OK if it is right' (Student 7, I4314). According to one student participant, inquisitiveness should be applied not only to what friends say, but also to the views of teachers, that is, those with more power in class. Embedded in the idea of inquisitiveness was the true/false or right/wrong dichotomy in the students' conception of critical thinking, which indicated a relatively limited view of critical thinking. Evidence of such a right/wrong or true/false dichotomy was common in the students' responses. For example, Student 14 thought critical thinking meant always asking whether other people said something correctly in order to fix it.

Teacher 1, who included curiosity when referring to the characteristics of critical thinking, emphasised that curiosity in this sense was of a scientific nature and critical thinkers need to be 'curious, but in a scientific way about any piece of information they encounter' (Teacher 1, I13314). She added: 'This does not mean that they want to know the information for fun but for a thorough understanding about its source, accuracy or applicability' (Teacher 1, I13314).

Objectivity was seen as a characteristic of critical thinking; however, only the interviewed students mentioned this disposition. Student 5 saw the action of selecting the most objective options to avoid subjectivity and bias as one essential step in critical thinking. This student argued that the process of selecting the most objective factors of an issue helps someone to criticise their own viewpoint or those of others. Objectivity also means not seeing things from only one viewpoint. Student 17 noted that critical thinking was a sharp way of thinking, seeing things from different sides and from different perspectives. Similarly, Student 8 explained critical thinking as 'the right assessment of a certain issue, recognising it comprehensively' (Student 8, I4314).

Open-mindedness was another disposition addressed in the participants' definitions. Student 19 emphasised a willingness to change his mind when recognising that he is wrong. This student extended this openness to other viewpoints, describing the importance of personal opinions: 'Other people may not agree with you but you need to find ways to defend your opinions. If you are wrong, you need to accept that' (Student 19, I7314). However, nobody referred to open-mindedness in the sense that individuals can disagree without being necessarily wrong or right.

4.5 Critical thinking means self-reflection

In five out of the 28 interviews with the teachers and students, self-reflection was considered an indicator of critical thinking. Teacher 2 pointed out that critical thinking is not just criticising, but reflecting on oneself, connecting the problem with one's own experience. Student 22 elaborated: 'When we read or hear about a problem, we think about it, reflecting on our own situations to see if it is true or not' (Student 22, I13314). Student 16 alluded to reflection as a personalisation process. He considered that a person should not rely too heavily on what other people said; instead, that person needed to personalise it to have a better understanding or to form a better judgment. Student 5 described critical thinking as the process of receiving, selecting and comparing the most objective factors to criticise one's own arguments or those of other people, and self-reflection is an indication of critical thinking. In this case, the objects of criticism also included 'the world of oneself' (Barnett, 1997, p. 71).

5. Discussion

Vietnamese EFL teachers and students' limited conceptions of critical thinking

The interview data from both the teachers and students demonstrate that the participants saw critical thinking as a cognitive activity that requires certain skills. The participants associated critical thinking with analysing, synthesising and evaluating – the higher order levels of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy. Critical thinking also entails a critical disposition (Siegel, 1991, p. 26) that may include inquiring, curiosity, open-mindedness, and objective capacities. Self-reflection is considered another characteristic of critical thinking, the participants advocating reflecting on oneself to understand a problem better or more comprehensively. As regards the domains of criticality, the participants' conceptions of critical thinking mainly centred on the domain of knowledge (Barnett, 1997), that is, the language and content input that the students received from their teachers, peers and materials. The domain of self was mentioned less often, while the domain of the world was barely countenanced. Some participants related critical thinking to self-reflexivity or metacognition; that is, reflecting on one's own thinking about certain issues. However, no participants referred to critical thinking in reference to taking action against unfairness or inequality in society.

The findings about the Vietnamese EFL teachers and students' limited understanding of critical thinking are consistent with recent studies on EFL teachers or learners' ways to define critical thinking in other EFL contexts (e.g., Yuan & Stapleton, 2019; Ma & Luo, 2020). In close reference to the extant approaches to critical thinking and its conceptual framework used in this study, it can be said

that the Vietnamese participants were able to name some features of critical thinking, but these are just at Paul's (1992) weak form of critical thinking or Barnett's (1997) forms of critical reason. The participants failed to link to Barnett's (1997) self and world domains.

Special features in the Vietnamese EFL teachers and students' conceptions of critical thinking

Some features in the participants' conceptions of critical thinking that have not manifested in other studies were identified. An example was the tendency to see critical thinking as a tool to express personal voice in response to other people's opinions. Defending or expressing personal opinion with evidence was seen as a product of a rational process and self-reflection. For nearly all of the participants, the concept of critical thinking was closely related to personal voice, and thinking critically equated to expressing that personal voice. Apart from this, the right/wrong dichotomy was highlighted as the aim that the participants were searching for while practising critical thinking. Both the teacher and student participants mentioned the right/wrong dichotomy as one of the criteria for evaluating a piece of information or of their own or others' arguments. As well, the targets of criticism were, in most cases, other people's opinions or arguments. Only one participant (Student 5) discussed applying critical thinking to himself. One's own assumptions were not the main focus of the participants' conceptions. The idea of defending one's own arguments against others' was quite strong in the participants' conceptions of critical thinking.

The tendency to construct critical thinking as a tool to express personal voice in response to other people's opinions was common in the participants' conceptualisations of critical thinking. In particular, the students equated thinking critically with voicing their thoughts in order to defend their own opinions. The students' understanding of critical thinking reflects Paul's (1992) weak sense of critical thinking: defending one's own understanding, convincing others that one's own point of view is correct. To the students, critical thinking lacks one of the two seemingly contrary components in Gieve's (1998) definition of critical thinking– defending and questioning oneself.

The idea of defending one's own argument against those of others was quite robust in students' conceptions of critical thinking. Also, the subjects of criticism in their responses were, in most cases, either the issue under discussion or other people (their opinions or arguments). Criticism of others can operate in the absence of critical thinking, and might be self-centred in nature. Only one student spoke of the application of critical thinking to himself. The component of one's own assumptions was far from the main focus in the participants' conceptions. This suggests that their conceptions of critical thinking were oriented more towards Paul's (1992) weak sense of critical thinking, meaning critical thinking that serves the interest of a particular individual or group. The participants' ultimate goal of critical thinking seems to be to defend oneself, which could be seen as ego-centric. The students appeared to defend their initial beliefs rather than try to apply critical questions to all claims, including their own (Browne & Keeley, 2007).

The study uncovered a right/wrong dichotomy as one aim that the participants are seeking while practising critical thinking. The right/wrong dichotomy affects the students' openness to different

viewpoints, an important trait of critical thinking. The right/wrong dichotomy suggests that there is a right answer; such a view might stifle creativity and lateral thinking. Such an approach might also more naturally be applied to lower orders of Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, such as knowledge.

The participants' emphasis on the right/wrong dichotomy may be attributable to the tradition of teaching and learning in Vietnam. Due to the prevailing hierarchical system, teaching tends to be dictatorial (Tuy, 2000). Knowledge is transmitted one-way, from teachers to students: teachers are seen as the only knowers in the classroom (Ha, 2004; Ly et al., 2014; Thanh, 2007; Tuyet, 2012). Therefore, students tend to think that the knowledge imparted by their teachers is infallible. Although some students in the present study did not hold this belief very strongly, their inclusion of right/wrong criteria when assessing other arguments revealed that the Vietnamese students and teachers are still deeply influenced by the traditional teaching and learning approach that highlight the teachers' knowledge. This tradition is believed to affect students' critical thinking (Dong, 2015).

6. Conclusions

In short, the participants in the research context appeared to have quite a rudimentary understanding of critical thinking. Although their conceptualisation of critical thinking was two-dimensional with both cognitive skills and affective dispositions, their understanding was limited to the first two levels of criticality in Barnett's (1997) framework. The concept of critical thinking is understood mainly within the domains of knowledge and self, not in the domain of the world. The initial findings of the distinctive features in the participants' conceptions of critical thinking suggest a certain influence of contextual factors on their conceptualisations of critical thinking.

From the research findings, a number of implications can be made for better integration of critical thinking into Vietnamese EFL classrooms or similar EFL contexts.

Firstly, Vietnamese EFL teachers and learners should be offered training programmes or workshops on critical thinking and critical thinking instruction in EFL classrooms. Some unique features of critical thinking identified in this study can be a resource for Vietnamese EFL teachers and students to discuss in those training programmes or workshops so that they can reach a more thorough understanding of this concept. For example, the discussion of whether EFL teachers and learners should care much about the right/wrong answers in their EFL classrooms and how this could prevent them from thinking critically.

Secondly, Vietnamese EFL teachers should try the conceptual framework of critical thinking used in this study. The study used a critical thinking framework that is a combination of Barnett's (1997) domains of criticality and Bloom's (1956) higher-order thinking processes. Although the findings about the participants' definition of critical thinking did not fit in the whole framework, it served some purposes in the study's context. Barnett's (1997) triad of knowledge, self and world domains for criticality outlines the foci of a learner's criticality. In the context of L2 learning, these correspond to knowledge of the target language and its relationship to the cultures of its speakers; the learners' reflection on their own language and culture and their learning strategies; and the learners' awareness of the different socio-political norms underlying different languages and cultures. Using Barnett's domains

of criticality could help students and teachers better understand the areas for developing critical thinking in EFL contexts.

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Grit as a Predictor of Foreign Language Proficiency: An Investigation of Grit and EFL Proficiency in Japanese University Students

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Abstract

Japanese learners of English as a foreign language often do not attain levels of English proficiency that allow them to conduct even simple conversations in English. If a predictor of foreign language learning outcomes were available, educators could potentially identify and support students at risk of poor outcomes. This study investigated the non-cognitive trait of grit as a possible predictor of foreign language learning outcomes in Japanese university students. An online anonymous survey was conducted at two universities in eastern Japan. In addition to demographic information such as sex, age, and year in school, respondents were asked to self-report their most recent score on a standardized test of English, such as TOEIC or TOEFL, as well as their current GPA. Additionally, participants were administered a Japanese translation of the Grit-S measure. After confirming the validity of both the data and the measure, regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between grit and the English proficiency test scores both before and after controlling for prior academic achievement as measured by GPA. It was found that higher grit was predictive of higher English proficiency test scores, even after controlling for GPA. After presenting these findings, the implications of these results and ideas for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Grit, English as a Foreign Language, Educational Psychology, Japan, University Education

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1. Introduction

Educational psychology research has empirically demonstrated that a variety of individual differences in learners contribute to successful learning outcomes (Mayer, 2018). In addition to general intelligence, as typically measured by Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests (Zuffiano et al., 2013), non-cognitive traits such as self-efficacy (Nasir & Sarwat, 2019), Emotional Regulation Ability (Ivcevic & Brackett, 2014), growth mindset (Rui & Muthukrishnan, 2019; Wilang, 2021) and

conscientiousness (Song et al., 2020) have all been shown to play a role in helping students achieve academic success. The non-cognitive trait of grit (Duckworth et al., 2007) has also been proposed as a predictor of successful learning outcomes. Defined as "perseverance and passion for long term goals" (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087), grit has been empirically shown to correlate with and predict learning outcomes in a wide variety of academic domains including elementary and middle school (West et al., 2016), high school (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Muenks et al., 2017, Schmidt et al., 2019), university (Bowman et al., 2015; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn 2009; Hwang et al., 2018; Lee & Sohn, 2017; Muenks et al., 2017; Schmidt et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2014; Wolters & Hussain, 2015), graduate school (Cross, 2014), and pharmacy school (Pate et al, 2017).

While a great deal of grit research has examined the relationship between grit and learning outcomes in academic contexts, only a handful of studies have investigated the role of grit in foreign language learning (e.g., Giordano, 2019; Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019; Teimouri et al., 2020), and of these studies none has investigated the relationship between grit and foreign language proficiency. This is surprising given that learning a foreign language requires persistent and concentrated effort over a long period of time in order for language acquisition to take place (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017; VanPatten & Williams, 2015). If grit is a predictor of foreign language learning outcomes, it could be used by educators to identify and support students that may be at-risk of struggling in foreign language learning classrooms. Such a predictor would be especially useful in Japan, where most learners do not achieve levels of English proficiency that enable them to conduct even simple conversations in English (Kobayashi, 2019; Lee, 2019). Although Japan continues to try to improve English education, for example by encouraging the development of English-medium undergraduate programs (Brown, 2017), such efforts have yet to produce a noticeable effect on the English language proficiency of Japanese students. In this study, the relationship between grit and foreign language proficiency was investigated in a sample of Japanese university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Materials and Methods

Research Questions

This study set out to investigate the following two research questions.

RQ1: What is the relationship between grit and the English language proficiency of Japanese university students, as measured by scores on the TOEIC or TOEFL standardized tests of English?

RQ2: What is the relationship between grit and the English language proficiency of Japanese university students, as measured by scores on the TOEIC or TOEFL standardized tests of English, after controlling for prior academic achievement as measured by grade point average (GPA)?

Methodology and Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental ex post facto survey design to gather data about the research participants. Although experimental designs are the preferred way to statistically investigate

research questions, quasi-experimental designs are more appropriate when the variables being studied are intrinsic to the participants, such as ethnicity, gender, or, as is the case in this study, grit (Price et al., 2015; Silva, 2010). Quasi-experimental ex post facto survey designs have been used in numerous grit studies in order to demonstrate grit's predictive relationship with positive outcomes (e.g. Strayhorn, 2014; Muenks et al., 2017; Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019; Wolters & Hussain, 2015), so this study aligns well with prior grit research.

Population and Sample

The population under study in this research is composed of Japanese university students attending four-year colleges. Despite having had six years of English classes in middle school and high school and an additional two years of EFL classes at the university level, Japanese students tend to have poor levels of English proficiency (Kobayashi, 2019; Lee, 2019). The situation is so severe that Japan ranks 41st out of 49 countries in average Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores (ETS, 2018a). There are a variety of reasons for the poor performance of Japanese EFL students, including an overreliance on grammar-translation as an instructional methodology (Morita, 2015), lack of adequate teacher training (Otsu, 2017), and an entrance exam system which promotes rote memorization over the productive use of language (Lee, 2019).

For a study to have external validity, the research sample should represent the population as closely as possible (Mertens, 2015). There is some evidence that grit studies require large sample sizes in order for relationships to be detected. For example, while Palisoc et al. (2017) only investigated 98 students studying at a single pharmacy school and found no significant relationship between grit and student GPA, Pate et al. (2017) sampled 724 pharmacy students across three institutions and found a significant predictive relationship between grit and GPA. Similarly, whereas Salles et al. (2017) found no significant relationship between grit and retention in a surgical residency program with only 73 participants, Hakeem et al. (2020) found with a sample of 427 neurosurgery residents that grit was negatively related with burnout among residents. These studies imply that grit research may require larger sample sizes in order for statistically significant relationships to be detected. Therefore, to ensure a large enough sample size and allow for generalization of the results, participants were recruited from two four-year universities located in the eastern region of Japan. The first university research site specializes in science and technology majors and enrolls approximately 10,000 undergraduate students per year. The second university research site specializes in language majors and enrolls approximately 3,500 undergraduate students per year. The students at both research sites are required to periodically take standardized tests of English such as TOEIC or the paper-based Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The scores on these tests are used by the universities to decide placement in streamed EFL programs as well as to determine eligibility for school-sponsored scholarships and study abroad programs.

Participants were recruited via an email announcement from each research site's Academic Affairs office. It was stressed in the recruitment email that participation in the research was voluntary

and there was neither a reward for participating nor a penalty for not participating. The recruitment email contained a link to the consent forms and research instrument, which were hosted on SurveyMonkey (2020).

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data for this research was an online anonymous survey (Appendix A). The screening questions, research consent forms, and survey itself were all written in Japanese, the native language of the participants. Potential respondents first needed to confirm that they were a Japanese national, over the age of 18, and currently matriculating as a second-, third-, or fourth-year student at the research site. First-year students were excluded from this study due to the fact that they had yet to establish a university GPA, which was used as a controlling variable representing prior academic achievement during the data analysis phase of the study.

Once respondents indicated they were eligible for participation in the study, they were provided access to the informed consent forms, which explained the purpose of the study and what would be required of participants and given the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they did not agree with the terms. After informed consent was obtained, participants were given access to the survey itself, which was divided into two parts. The first half of the survey collected demographic information about the participants including: sex, age, year in school, major, and self-reported GPA. Students were also asked which standardized test of English, TOEIC or TOEFL, they had most recently taken and to provide their latest score on that test. Students at both research sites are required, at a minimum, to take either the TOEIC or paper-based TOEFL test once every two years. The scores students receive on these university mandated tests as well as their GPA are available on the students' personal university webpage, ensuring that all participants had access to their most recent scores.

The second half of the survey utilized a Japanese-translation (Nishikawa et al., 2015) of the Grit-S measure (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) to assess respondents' grit. The Grit-S is a self-report survey which consists of eight Likert-scale items, four of which measure the perseverance of effort subscale and four of which measure the consistency of interest subscale. As the name implies, the perseverance of effort subscale measures the tendency of the respondent to maintain sustained effort over time toward goals whereas the consistency of interest subscale measures the respondents' tendency to stay focused and not be distracted from goals (Crede et al., 2017). Each item in the measure is self-rated by participants on a scale of 1 = *not at all like me* to 5 = *very much like me*. The respondent's total grit score is calculated by summing the scores on all items (with consistency of interest items reverse-scored) and dividing by the number of items (i.e., eight) to produce a score between 1 and 5, with higher values indicating that a respondent tends to be grittier.

Ethical Assurances

Data collection for this study was conducted as part of a Ph.D. dissertation research project. Approval from Northcentral University's Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to the collection of data

(Appendix B), as was permission from Academic Affairs offices of both research sites. All students agreeing to participate in the research study digitally agreed to an informed consent form which explained the purpose of the research and how data would be collected and managed, as well as promising confidentiality to all participants. The consent forms explicitly stated that students could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty, although no respondents chose to do so. No identifying information about participants was collected during the study and participants were promised that study results would only be published in aggregate form, without any individual answers displayed. Only the primary researcher had access to the study data, which was kept in a password-protected file in a password-protected computer. A password-protected backup of the data was also stored in the cloud.

Results

In total 283 second-, third-, and fourth-year Japanese university students filled in the anonymous online survey to completion. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS statistics (Version 25). First, the validity of both the data and the instrument were investigated to check for outliers or potential bias. Next, a descriptive analysis of the data was conducted. Finally, linear regression was utilized to answer the research questions.

Validity of the Data

While reviewing the completed surveys, three cases were identified as problematic due to the reporting of extremely low GPA scores: two students input a GPA of 0 and a third student input a GPA score of 0.8. These are improbably low scores but because the survey was anonymous, there was no way to ascertain the correct GPA value for each of the respondents. Because these cases would heavily skew the planned regression analysis of the data, they were removed from the study.

In addition to the above three cases, several issues were identified with demographic data input by respondents. For example, some non-science majors such as Project Management majors had erroneously identified themselves as science majors and conversely some science majors such as Engineering majors had misidentified themselves as non-science majors. These mistakes were corrected. Additionally, major names were modified to ensure consistency. For example, some Project Management majors identified themselves as simply “Management” majors and some International Communication majors identified themselves by their abbreviated name, “IC Department.” All major names were therefore standardized to be consistent.

Validity of the Instrument

The validity of the Grit-S measure has been established in several published studies. Numerous studies have confirmed the construct validity of the Grit-S through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (e.g. Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth et al., 2009; Muenks, et al., 2017). Criterion validity has also been demonstrated in studies which have shown grit’s value in predicting positive outcomes such as higher

GPA scores (Bowman et al., 2015; Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn 2009; Hwang et al., 2018; Muenks et al., 2017; Schmidt et al., 2019; Strayhorn, 2014; Wolters & Hussain, 2015) and psychological well-being (Datu et al., 2018, Salles et al., 2017; Wyszynska et al., 2017). Both Duckworth and Quinn (2009) and Nishikawa et al. (2015) have used the Grit-S with university student populations and found the Grit-S to have from moderate reliability as measured by Cronbach's alpha scores. Furthermore, goodness-of-fit indices showed the Japanese translated version of the Grit-S to be a good fit for Japanese university students (Nishikawa et al., 2015).

To assess the internal reliability of the instrument used in this study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for both the measure as a whole and each individual sub-factor, as is typically done in grit studies (Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014). Values of .70 or higher are usually taken to represent adequate reliability in a measure (Field, 2016), although values of .60 or higher are also considered acceptable (Aron et al., 2013). Items 2, 4, 7, and 8 in the Grit-S represent the perseverance of effort subscale and demonstrated moderate reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .76. The consistency of interest subscale, composed of the remaining items, was slightly lower but still within the acceptable range at a value of .67. The first item in the subscale, "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones," demonstrated a slightly weak corrected-item total value of .28. Corrected item-total correlation values of less than .30 indicate an item did not correlate strongly with the total score of the scale and may be an issue (Field, 2016). However, recalculating the internal reliability without the item resulted in only a slight increase of Cronbach's alpha to .69 and therefore the item was kept. The Grit-S as a whole displayed moderately strong internal reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .78. The Cronbach's alphas found in this study align with those of Duckworth and Quinn (2009), who reported Cronbach's alphas ranging from .60 to .78 for the perseverance of effort subscale, .73 to .79 for the consistency of interest subscale, and .73 to .83 for the Grit-S overall in the populations they studied.

Findings

Demographic Questions

The first part of the survey instrument asked students to report on demographic variables including their sex, major, age, and year in school. Table 1 summarizes the results of the demographic questions.

Of particular note is that female respondents composed 63.9% (n = 179) of the sample compared with males who composed only 36.1% (n = 101). Yet in the general population of Japanese undergraduate students, female university students compose only 44% of the population whereas males comprise 56% (Statista, 2020). While the sample used in this study may not be representative of Japanese universities in general, it closely matches the demographic situation at the second research site, which specializes in language majors. This is likely a result of the fact that approximately 2/3 of the survey respondents were language major undergraduates from the second research site (n = 189). Language majors were overwhelmingly studying English and in either the English department (n = 90) or the International Communications department (n = 39), although a variety of other language majors were represented including Spanish (n = 18), Chinese (n = 10), and Thai (n = 9). Science and

technology majors were more evenly distributed among the various majors, with Information Systems (*n* = 14) and Applied Chemistry (*n* = 12) being the most prevalent majors. Majors other than languages or sciences included Design (*n* = 9), Project Management (*n* = 6), and Urban Planning (*n* = 5).

Table 1
Summary of Demographic Question Results (N = 280)

Demographic Variable	*n*	*%*
Sex		
Male	101	36.1
Female	179	63.9
Majors		
Language	189	67.5
Science	66	23.6
Other	25	8.9
Year in School		
2nd Year	153	54.6
3rd Year	68	24.3
4th Year	59	21.1
Age		
18 years old	7	2.5
19 years old	94	33.6
20 years old	99	35.4
21 years old	51	18.2
22+ years old	29	10.2

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were sophomores (*n* = 153) and their age was 20 years old (*n* = 99). In fact, more sophomores responded to the survey than third-year and fourth-year students combined (*n* = 127). Likely due to the overwhelming response by sophomores, respondents reporting an age of 19 or 20 (*n* = 193) outnumbered all other age groups (*n* = 87) by a ratio of more than 2:1.

In summary, the majority of respondents to this survey were second-year female English majors of approximately 20 years of age. Obviously, this is not representative of Japanese university demographics in general. Therefore, caution must be used when attempting to generalize the results of this study to the larger population of Japanese university students as a whole.

GPA

GPA was utilized as a controlling variable during the data analysis phase of the research. Figure 1 below provides a histogram of the GPA reported by the respondents. As can be seen from the figure, the GPA scores appear non-normally distributed. However, because regression analysis does not require either the independent or dependent variables to be normally distributed (Field, 2016), the non-normal distribution should not be an issue for this study.

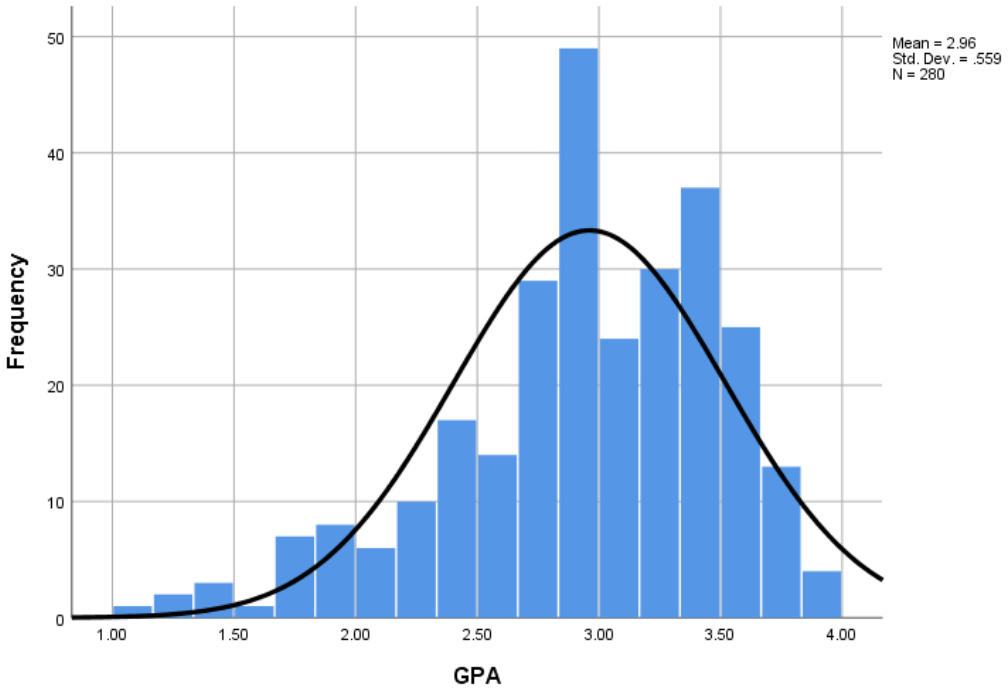

Figure 1. Histogram of GPA Scores

Standardized Test Scores

Respondent scores on the TOEIC and paper-based TOEFL tests of English proficiency were used as the dependent variable in the data analysis phase of this study. Before tests scores on the TOEIC and TOEFL could be analyzed, they needed to be standardized to a common measure. Ideally the test scores should have been converted to *z*-scores by subtracting each score from the population mean and dividing by the population standard deviation (Field, 2016). However, although the population mean for Japanese university students on both the TOEFL and TOEIC were publicly available online (ETS, 2018b; The Institute for International Business Communication, 2019), no information could be found for the population standard deviation on either test. Therefore, TOEFL test scores were converted to their TOEIC near-equivalents using an online universal conversion table (The Edge Learning Center, 2020). Figure 2 shows a histogram of the standardized test scores after the conversion. As with GPA, the standardized test scores appear non-normally distributed. However, as mentioned previously regression analysis does not require either the independent or dependent variables to be normally distributed (Field, 2016).

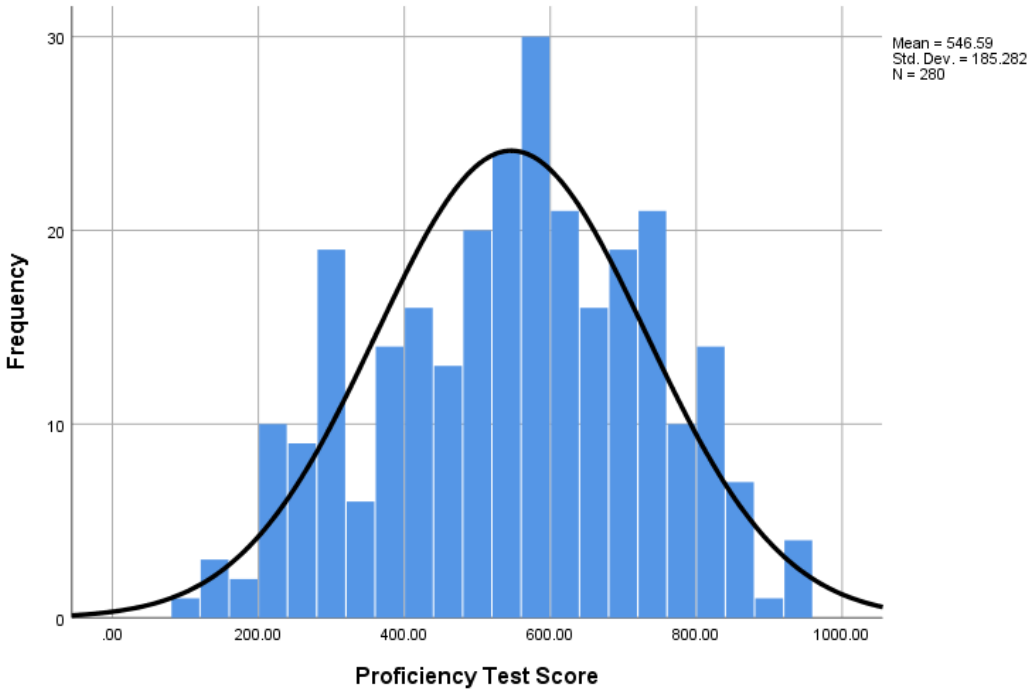

Figure 2. Histogram of Standardized Test Scores

Note: TOEFL scores have been converted to their TOEIC near-equivalents.

Grit

Grit scores were utilized as an independent variable in the data analysis phase of this study. Regression analysis requires that independent variables be either ordinal with only two values or continuous in nature (Field, 2016). However, Likert-scale data with two or more ordinal choices can be treated as a continuous variable in regression analysis if the data follows a normal distribution (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). As can be seen from Figure 3, the grit scores roughly follow a normal distribution. The normality of the distribution was confirmed by a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality, which was not significant, $D(280) = .05$, $p = .06$.

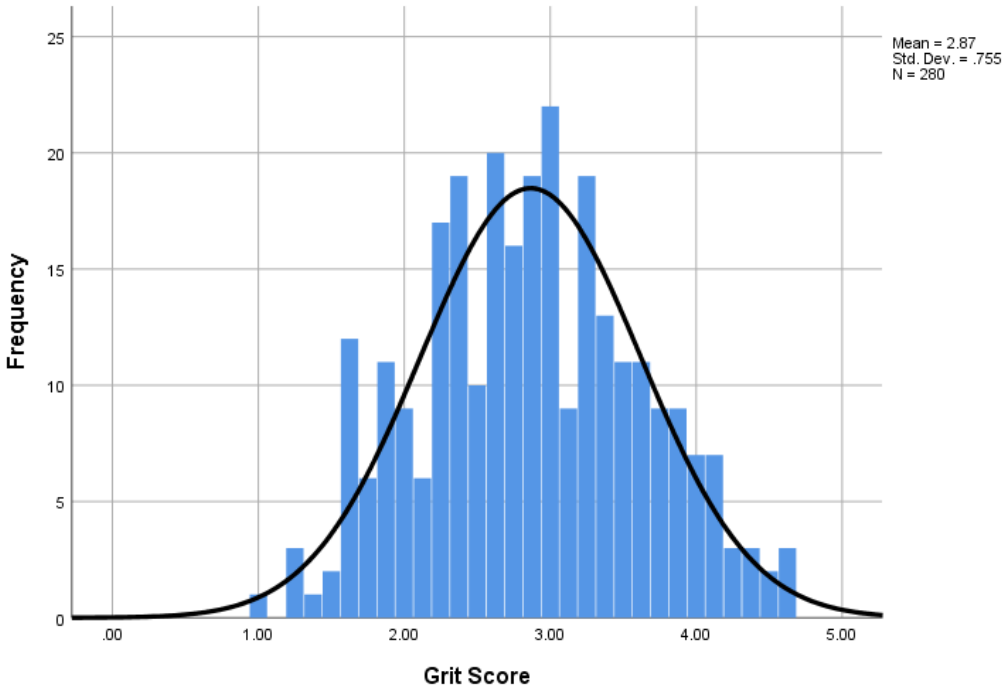

Figure 3. Histogram of Grit Scores

Data Analysis

Regression analysis was used to investigate what relationship grit has with the English proficiency scores of Japanese university students both before and after controlling for the effects of prior academic achievement as measured by GPA. In order for the results of a regression analysis to be valid, four assumptions must be met: the relationship between independent and dependent variables must be linear, the errors should be normally distributed, there should be no collinearity between predictors, and the spread of residuals should be constant (Field, 2016). Each of these assumptions was checked independently. A scatterplot matrix of grit, GPA, and standardized test scores confirmed the linear relationship between the variables (Figure 4). A P-P plot of residuals confirmed that the errors were roughly normally distributed (Figure 5). Multicollinearity was checked using a bivariate correlation between grit and GPA. Pearson correlation coefficients of greater than .8 are considered indications of problems with multicollinearity (Steyn, 2016). While grit and GPA were correlated to a statistically significant degree ($p < .001$), the Pearson correlation coefficient was much less than .8 ($r = .24$). Finally, the spread of residuals was checked with a plot of standardized residuals against predicted values (Figure 6). The plot did not display any particular pattern, which indicates there are likely no problems with homoscedasticity (Field, 2016).

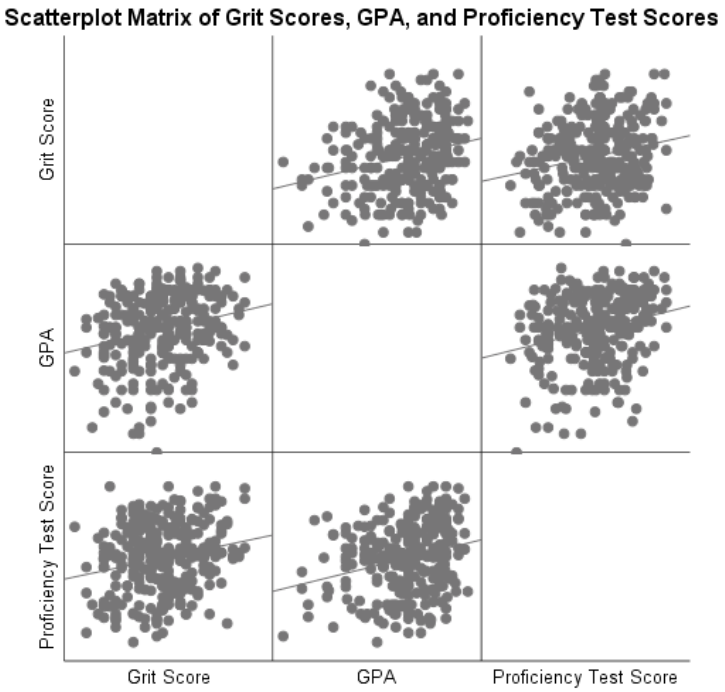

Figure 4. Scatterplot Matrix of Grit, GPA, and Standardized Test Scores

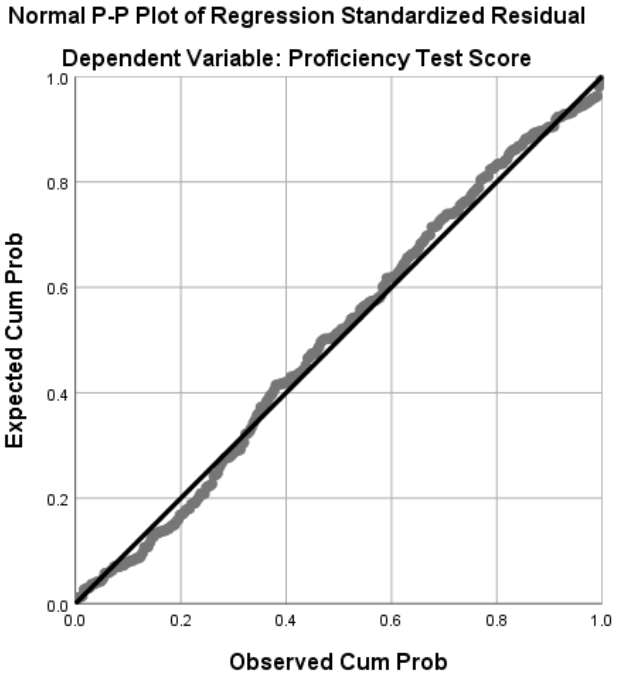

Figure 5. P-P Plot of Residuals

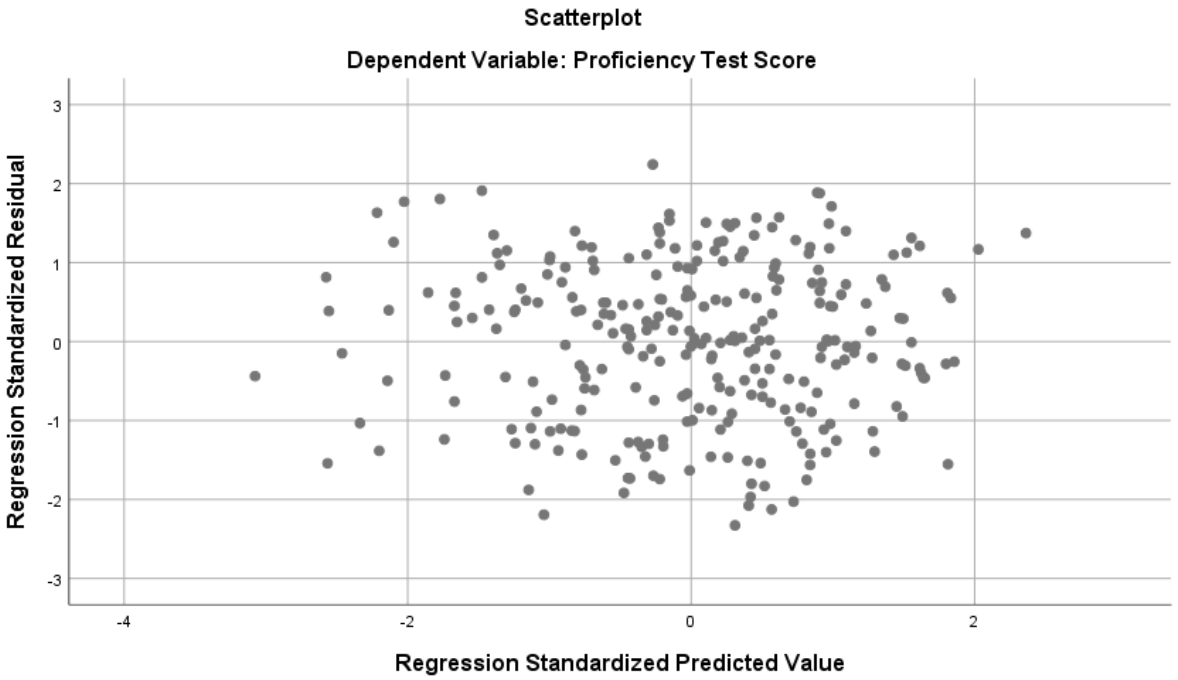

Figure 6. Plot of Standardized Residuals Against Predicted Values (zpred vs. zresid)

Research Question #1

Having ensured that all assumptions for running a regression analysis had been met, a simple linear regression was conducted to answer the first research question: what is the relationship between grit and the English language proficiency of Japanese university students, as measured by scores on the TOEIC or TOEFL standardized tests of English? The regression was significant, F(1, 278) = 13.54, p < .001, with an R^2 = .05 indicating that approximately 5% of the variance in the proficiency test scores were explained by grit. Table 2 provides a linear model of predictors for the simple regression analysis that was conducted.

Table 2
Linear Model of Predictors of Test Scores (Simple Regression)

	b	***SE***	***β***	***p***
Constant	395.15 [311.36, 478.93]	42.56		*p* < .001
Grit	52.85 [24.57, 81.12]	14.36	.22	*p* < .001

Note: 95% bias corrected confidence intervals are reported in brackets. R^2 = .05 (p < .001).

Research Question #2

Having determined that grit by itself predicted proficiency test score outcomes, a multiple regression analysis was run to answer the second research question: what is the relationship between grit and the English language proficiency of Japanese university students after controlling for prior academic achievement as measured by GPA? In Step One of the regression analysis, GPA was input as a controlling variable. The model demonstrated a good fit with F(1, 278) = 18.317, p <.001, and GPA explaining 6% of the variance in the data. In Step Two of the regression analysis, grit was input as the

independent variable. This model also demonstrated a good fit, $F(1, 277) = 7.84$, $p < .01$. Additionally, grit was shown to explain 2% of the variance in the data beyond GPA. The results of the multiple regression analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Linear Model of Predictors of Test Scores (Multiple Regression)

	b	***SE***	***β***	***p***
Step 1				
Constant	302.36 [188.05, 416.67]	58.07		$p < .001$
GPA	82.48 [44.54, 120.41]	19.27	.25	$p < .001$
Step 2				
Constant	224.98 [99.62, 350.34]	63.68		$p < .001$
GPA	69.34 [30.74, 107.94]	19.61	.21	$p < .001$
Grit	40.58 [12.04, 69.12]	14.50	.17	$p < .01$

Note: 95% bias corrected confidence intervals are reported in brackets.

$R^2 = .06$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $R^2 = .08$ for Step 2 ($p < .01$).

Discussion

This study utilized a quasi-experimental ex post facto survey design to investigate the relationship between grit and foreign language learning in Japanese university students. Grit was found to predict the English standardized test scores of Japanese university students to a statistically significant degree even after controlling for prior academic achievement as measured by GPA. In this section, the implications of these findings as well as suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Implications

Before discussing this study's implications, it must be stressed again that the results from this study should be generalized cautiously. A disproportionate number of respondents in the survey sample were second-year female language majors, which is not representative of the population of Japanese university students as a whole. Nevertheless, this study seems to confirm prior research (Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019) that higher grit is predictive of better foreign language learning outcomes. Robins (2019), for example, found grit to be predictive of both the grades and retention of Spanish and Portuguese EFL learners enrolled in an online course, even after controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, and highest level of education received by the respondents' parents. Meanwhile, Wei et al. (2019) found that grit predicted the scores of Chinese middle-school students on school-wide English exams even after controlling for demographic variables such as age and gender. In the current study, students with higher grit scores scored higher on standardized tests of English proficiency to a statistically significant degree compared with students with lower scores.

However, it should be noted that the effects sizes in both the current study and prior research (Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019) are rather small. Robins (2019), for example, reported that grit

explained only about 1% of the variance in grades for the EFL students who participated in the research. Wei et al. (2019), on the other hand, did not regress grit separately from other predictors. With all predictors, such as enjoyment of English lessons and classroom environment, included in the model, 23% of the variance in the student EFL test scores were accounted for. R^2 values of less than .30 are traditionally interpreted to be small (Field, 2016) and it can be assumed that if grit were regressed separately from the other predictors, the effect size in Wei et al.'s (2019) study would be even smaller. This study found that grit explained 5% of variance in English proficiency test scores by itself and 2% of test scores beyond GPA, both of which are traditionally interpreted as small effects sizes.

Given the results of these studies, it does appear that although grit has a statistically significant effect on language learning outcomes, this effect is rather on the small side. This suggests that while grit may be useful as a predictor of foreign language learning outcomes, it should not be used in any high-stakes settings, such as admissions criterion into foreign language programs. However, educators may find grit scores useful in the early identification of students that are at risk of poor foreign language learning outcomes. Students with grit scores on the lower end of the scale may need extra support both during and outside of class in order for them to achieve targeted levels of proficiency. Of course, grit scores should not be the only determining factor in deciding when and how to support students but rather should be used alongside other assessments to provide a more holistic picture of student progress.

At this time, it is not recommended that foreign language educators attempt to foster grit in their students in any way. There is no evidence to date that suggests that grit is a malleable trait which is susceptible to interventions (Crede et al., 2017). Indeed, attempts in the United States to foster grit in students have instead resulted in controversy, as the attempts have disproportionately targeted students of color and those with disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds in an attempt to gloss over the structural inequalities which exist within the United States education system (Golden, 2017; Herold, 2015; Ris, 2015; Saltman, 2014; Socol, 2014; Stokas, 2015; Thomas, 2017). However, there is some evidence that grit is mediated by self-regulated learning strategies, which have been shown to be receptive to interventions (Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Therefore, foreign language teachers interested in fostering their students' long-term efforts may consider introducing and teaching self-regulated learning strategies in their classes.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study found a significant positive relationship between grit and the language proficiency of Japanese university students, research into the role of grit in the foreign language learning process is still in its infancy. Therefore, more research is required before any definitive conclusions can be drawn. There are several aspects of grit's relationship with foreign language learning which need to be clarified. First, there is some debate in the field of grit as to whether grit is a domain-general personality trait which is applied to all aspects of a person's life or a domain-specific trait which varies

depending on the context. Although the bulk of grit studies have utilized a domain-general approach to researching grit, there is a growing body of work that has investigated grit from a domain-specific perspective (e.g. Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Mondak, 2020; Morell, 2020, Schmidt et al., 2019). Teimouri et al. (2020) suggest that investigations of grit's relationship to foreign language learning should be conducted from a domain-specific perspective. Future research will need to clarify which of these approaches is more useful when investigating grit. It may in fact be the case that the choice of a domain-specific or domain-general perspective depends on the research question being examined.

Second, future research into grit's role in foreign language learning will need to clarify more specifically how grit interacts with the language learning process. While the bulk of grit research has been cross-sectional in nature (Crede et al., 2017), more longitudinal studies that utilize mixed-methods approaches will likely be required to explicate grit's specific effects on foreign language learning. Clark (2016), for example, used a mixed-methods design to investigate grit's role in career success and found that her interviews with participants helped explain the quantitative results of her study, which did not find a significant relationship between grit and career outcomes. Therefore, future research should consider longitudinal, mixed-methods designs in order to more robustly explore the relationship between grit and foreign language learning and determine the pathways by which grit affects the language learning process.

Conclusion

Grit research has demonstrated that grit can predict outcomes in a variety of domains including education (e.g. Bowman et al., 2015; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014; Palisoc et al., 2017; West et al., 2016), the military (e.g. Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2014), and work performance (Lechner et al., 2019, Suzuki et al., 2015). Additionally grit has been linked with specific positive outcomes including academic achievement (Crede et al., 2017), academic diligence (Galla et al., 2014) academic engagement (Datu et al., 2015; Datu et al., 2016), goal attainment (Sheldon et al., 2015), lower risk of depression (Datu et al., 2018; Salles et al., 2017), lower risk of burnout (Jumat et al., 2020), metacognitive awareness (Arslan et al., 2013); positive affect towards difficult tasks (Lucas et al., 2015), psychological well-being (Wyszynska et al., 2017), self-regulation (Wolters & Hussain, 2015), and resiliency to suicide (Kleiman et al., 2013). However, only a few studies to date have examined grit's relationship with foreign language learning (Giordano, 2019; Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019; Teimouri et al., 2020). Those studies which have investigated grit's relationship to measurable outcomes have found grit to be predictive of outcomes such as EFL class grades (Robins, 2019) and English test scores (Wei, 2019). Yet no studies have looked at the relationship between grit and foreign language proficiency.

Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between grit and EFL proficiency of Japanese university students. An anonymous online self-report survey was administered at two Japanese university research sites. Data including demographic information about respondents, GPA, standardized test of English scores (TOEFL/TOEIC), and grit scores were collected. In total, 280

responses were analyzed using regression analysis. The findings indicate that not only was grit predictive of English standardized test scores, it also explained 2% of variance in the data beyond GPA. These findings align with prior research into grit's relationship with foreign language learning outcomes (Robins, 2019; Wei et al., 2019) in that although grit is predictive of outcomes to a statistically significant degree, the effect size tends to be rather small. This implies that grit measures are probably only useful as an addition to other assessments in holistically identifying students at risk of poor foreign language learning outcomes. Much remains unknown about the relationship between grit and foreign language learning, as investigation into this area is still in its early stages. The bulk of grit research thus far has concentrated on quantitative cross-sectional designs (Crede et al., 2017). Therefore, future research into grit's role in the foreign language learning process may benefit from longitudinal and mixed-methods inquiries designed to shed more light on the perhaps subtle ways the non-cognitive trait of grit influences language learning.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Please answer all questions honestly! No one besides yourself will know how you answered these questions. If you are unsure of an answer, make your best guess.

Age

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 21+

Sex

- Male
- Female

Year in university

- 2nd Year
- 3rd Year
- 4th Year

Type of major

- Foreign Language
- Science/Technology
- Other

Name of major:

GPA (Your average grade in university classes, ranging from 0.00 to 4.00)

Example: 3.75

Which English test have you taken most recently and received your score for?

- TOEFL
- TOEIC

What was your score on the test you selected in the previous question?

Grit Questions

How well do the following statements describe you? Please answer honestly. No one will know how you answered these questions other than yourself.

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all
2. Setbacks don't discourage me
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me

- Not much like me
- Not like me at all

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
4. I am a hard worker
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
7. I finish whatever I begin
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all
8. I am diligent
    - Very much like me
    - Mostly like me
    - Somewhat like me
    - Not much like me
    - Not like me at all

Appendix B: IRB Approval

NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY

11355 N. Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, CA 92037

Date: May 22, 2020
PI Name: Jared Baierschmidt
Chair Name (if applicable): Janet Strickland
Application Type: Initial Submission
Review Level: Exempt - Category 2
Study Title: Exploring the Relationship Between Grit and English Language Proficiency in Japanese University Students

Approval Date: May 21, 2020

Dear Jared:

Congratulations! Your IRB application has been approved. Your responsibilities include the following:

1. Follow the protocol as approved. If you need to make changes with your population, recruitment, or consent, please submit a modification form.
2. If there is a consent process in your research, you must use the consent form approved with your final application. Please make sure all participants receive a copy of the consent form.
3. **If there are any injuries, problems, or complaints from participants (adverse events), you must notify the IRB at IRB@ncu.edu within 24 hours.**
4. IRB audit of procedures may occur. The IRB will notify you if your study will be audited.
5. When data are collected and de-identified, please submit a study closure form to the IRB.
6. You must maintain current CITI certification until you have submitted a study closure form.
7. If you are a student, please be aware that you must be enrolled in an active dissertation course with NCU in order to collect data.

Best wishes as you conduct your research!

Respectfully,

Northcentral University Institutional Review Board
Email: irb@ncu.edu

NCU.edu

Application of Metapragmatics to Language-Learning Research: A Longitudinal Study of Word Learning in Language Exchange Conversations

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Abstract

Second language acquisition (SLA) studies have not proposed a comprehensive theoretical and epistemological framework to capture both the object-level social interactions in which language learning occurs and meta-level practices of research describing it. Therefore, this study introduces the linguistic anthropological theory of "metapragmatics" into SLA research and demonstrates how it can manage both meta-level and object-level of social practices regarding language learning, with the primary focus on the latter. After considering SLA research in terms of the metapragmatic practice articulated by specific sociocultural perspectives, this study analyzes word learning during four months of language exchange conversations between two native and two non-native Japanese speakers. The results indicate that the state in which "someone has learned something" is indexically created through the metapragmatics of interaction, that is, by fading metapragmatic frames that focus on learning objects and related acts, highlighting the nonlinear, dynamic, indexical, and contextual aspects of language learning. This study concludes that the concept of metapragmatics can open new lines of SLA research to enhance the understanding of the social nature of learning and its research.

Keywords: *metapragmatics; frame; second language acquisition; achievement of learning*

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Introduction

Since Firth and Wagner's (1997) seminal article that argued for a reconceptualization of second language acquisition (SLA) research from a social and contextual perspective, considerable efforts have been made to reconceptualize SLA regarding what it means to learn a second language (L2), who L2 learners are, and what sociocultural context is involved and how (Atkinson, 2011; Cook, 2002; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2006, 2012; the Douglas Fir Group, 2016; van Lier, 2011).

Studies belonging to these "alternative approaches" (Atkinson, 2011) share a basic understanding that L2 learning is inseparable from social interaction; thus, researchers must consider various social dimensions of L2 learning to understand it properly. Based on this understanding, many studies have elucidated how L2 learning is embedded in socially co-constructed interactions inside or outside educational contexts (Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Eskildsen, 2018; Eskildsen, & Theodorsdottir, 2017; Hellermann, 2018; Kasper, 2004, 2009; Markee, 2008; Nguyen, 2011; Svennevig, 2018).

However, one sociocultural dimension has rarely been considered in previous studies: description of L2 learning by a researcher. Whenever researchers describe L2 learning, they encounter the question of how to define (L2) learning. More precisely, they require a specific definition or criteria—explicit or implicit—of L2 learning to assess whether it occurred. In general, researchers of SLA have employed existing cognitive and social theories to determine such a definition or criteria. Often, theoretical frameworks of recent studies include conversation analysis (CA), sociocultural theory, situated learning, and language socialization (Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Eskildsen, 2018; Kasper, 2004, 2009; Markee, 2008; Nguyen, 2011; Svennevig, 2018; Hall, 2018). However, describing L2 learning based on those theories is a sociocultural practice per se that reflects and reproduces specific perspectives and ideologies, as will be demonstrated subsequently. Although a similar type of self-reflexive recognition can be found in the field of critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) and some SLA studies that reconsidered the problematic concept of "competence" or "L2 learners" (Kramsch, 1986, 1993; Belz, 2002; Cook, 2002; Firth & Wagner, 1997; van Lier, 2011, Hall 2018), the necessity for researchers to examine their own practices of research from the sociocultural perspective has not been generally recognized in SLA studies.

To proceed with such self-reflexive work, researchers must manage at least two problems. First, the above-mentioned social theories of learning that have been a basis of recent SLA studies have restricted goals or scopes and are insufficient to examine research as a social practice.[1] Thus, researchers must employ other critical theories to conduct this reflexive work; however, this leads to a double standard situation in which L2 learning in social interactions and its description by researchers are examined using different frameworks. Second, considering the attitude of the researchers, having a reflexive critical acknowledgment of their work as a sociocultural practice that reflects and reproduces specific perspectives may make conducting their research challenging. These problems imply that SLA studies need a comprehensive theoretical and epistemological framework that can capture both the actual occurrences of L2 learning in social interactions and practices of describing them by researchers. Many possible candidates can enable researchers to critically examine their work, as critical discourse analysis has demonstrated (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Thus, our main objective here is to demonstrate how such a critical framework can be applied to describing and explaining L2 learning.

L2 learning per se is a sociocultural practice constituted by learners' and their interlocuters' use of language and other semiotic resources. SLA researchers take this practice as their research object,

which is also conducted through their language use. Thus, we can distinguish two levels of language use here: (1) the "object-level" language use by learners and their interlocutors and (2) the "meta-level" language use by researchers, which refers to the learners' language use.[2] Therefore, it is required that a new framework for SLA research is comprehensive enough to include both levels in its theoretical scope.

This study presents the semiotically focused linguistic anthropological theory of "metapragmatics" (Lucy, 1993; Silverstein, 1976, 1993, 2003; Urban, 2018; Wortham, 2003, 2005) and demonstrates how it can manage both the meta- and object-levels of social practices of L2 learning, with the primary focus on the latter. More precisely, this study aims to introduce metapragmatics into SLA research, demonstrate how it enables a unique understanding of L2 learning, and at the same time, provide a means for researchers of SLA to critically reflect on their work.

This article is organized as follows: first, it briefly introduces the concept of metapragmatics and demonstrates how it captures the sociocultural aspects of the meta-level practices of researchers describing L2 learning. Next, this article employs the concept to describe L2 learning in object-level social interactions and demonstrates its potential through a longitudinal analysis of word learning in L2 exchange conversations. Finally, the implications of introducing metapragmatics into SLA research and its future directions are discussed.

Metapragmatics: The linguistic anthropological conceptualization

Semiotically focused linguistic anthropology is a linguistic anthropological program mainly based on the theories of Silverstein (1976, 1985, 1992, 1993, 2003), who presented a means to understand language and human communication in terms of semiosis or sign process (Peirce, 1932).[3] In his theory, "pragmatics concerns signs, principally those that make up actually occurring typically linguistically segmentable discourse, looked at from the point of view of their indexical connections to the contexts in which they occur," and "[m]etapragmatics [...] deals with signs that represent or are about pragmatic signs" (Urban, 2018, p. 257-258). In other words, metapragmatics is a type of communication (i.e., language or sign use) that refers to communicative events and the elements thereof.

Notably, such references by metapragmatic signs "stipulate" object-level (i.e., pragmatic) discursive interaction (Silverstein, 1993). More specifically, the core function of metapragmatic signs is their "role[s] in constituting and framing ongoing discourse" (Mertz & Yovel, 2009, p. 252). This conceptualization is based on the understanding that only when there are metapragmatic functions simultaneously in play with pragmatic functions that constitute discursive interaction can individuals interpret what is occurring (Silverstein, 1993, p. 36). According to Silverstein (1993), "[s]igns functioning metapragmatically have pragmatic phenomena—indexical sign phenomena—as their semiotic objects; they thus have an inherently 'framing,' or 'regimenting,' or 'stipulative' character with respect to indexical phenomena" (p. 33). He also notes that "metapragmatic function serves to regiment

indexicals into interpretable event(s) of such-and-such type that the use of language in interaction constitutes (consists of)" (p. 37). To give an example, in the utterance "I order you to go," the use of the performative verb "order" functions as a metapragmatic sign that explicitly (i.e., semantically) and reflexively stipulates the utterance to which it is embedded as an act of a type of "ordering." Another example is when a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982) of a smile that has occurred with the utterance "I am so sorry" functions as an inexplicit (indexical) and reflexive metapragmatic sign that leads to a particular interpretation (e.g., insincerity).

However, a sign alone is insufficient to play a metapragmatic function because the contextualization of any sign is indeterminate or "almost limitlessly defeasible" (Silverstein, 1992, p. 55). Accordingly, a communicative event can be, in principle, interpreted in innumerable ways. There, what plays a powerful metapragmatic function is "poetic structure" or "a pattern of mutually presupposing indexical signs" (Wortham, 2005, p. 98). As Wortham (2003) succinctly stated, poetic structure "emerges, solidifies, and thus establishes a relevant context and a more plausible set of interpretations for a series of utterances" (p. 22; see also Silverstein [1985]). In the "I am so sorry" example, if the speaker's smile were accompanied by other indexical cues such as a mocking tone, shrugging, and rising sentence-final intonation, they will together constitute a poetic structure that would lead to a more coherent interpretation of the utterance.

Meanwhile, in many cases, framing or regimenting pragmatic signs, namely, metapragmatics, is mediated by "metadiscourses."[4] Metadiscourses "are the explicit and implicit framings available in a given society for understanding social events as coherent" (Wortham, 2003, p. 20). In other words, metadiscourses "are publicly circulating devices for interpreting or regimenting their object discourses" (Wortham, 2003, p. 20) or ideologies on which individuals rely to interpret communicative events around them (Silverstein, 2003). In the "I order you to go" example, publicly circulating ideologies on the social category of the speaker (e.g., teacher) may function as metadiscourses that mediate interpretation of the utterance.

In this manner, in the semiotically focused linguistic anthropology, communication, or discursive interaction is conceptualized as a dialectic process of pragmatics (i.e., language or sign use that permits endless contextualization) and metapragmatics (i.e., regimentation of those signs to construct a coherent interpretation).

Additionally, in the field of SLA research, the term "metapragmatic" has often been used in pedagogically focused studies in the form of "metapragmatic awareness" (Bagherkazemi, 2020; Taguchi, 2015). In those SLA studies, "metapragmatic" is understood in terms of the referential "aboutness" of language use, and the main concern is to examine the extent to which L2 learners' awareness of their language use is related to their pragmatic competence, which is mostly measured using conventional assessments (see Mertz & Yovel [2009] to compare how "metapragmatic awareness" is understood in linguistic anthropology). According to our literature review, no study has used the concept of metapragmatics in a linguistic anthropological sense to examine the social practices

regarding language learning.

Description of learning as a metapragmatic practice

How, then, can metapragmatics capture the sociocultural dimension of describing L2 learning, that is, the meta-level practice of researchers? If the research of (L2) learning is understood as a practice that refers to certain phases of social interaction and interprets them in terms of learning, it can be considered a metapragmatic practice that stipulates object-level social interaction that permits unlimited interpretation as tokens of an activity type of "learning." Based on this understanding, an essential problem for SLA researchers is to understand what it means to describe learning and the extent to which it reflects the specific perspectives or ideologies of those engaged in it.

Arbitrary nature of descriptions of learning

The ordinary concept of learning has two distinctive but interrelated aspects, namely, a "process" of certain ongoing acts of learning and a resultant "state" of those acts (cf. Berducci, 2011; Nishizaka, 2006).[5] On the one hand, a state in which an individual has already learned something presupposes a process of learning; on the other hand, when considering certain acts as part of a process of learning, we always assume specific states the process will (successfully) result in. Although a process precedes a state in the actual sense, the opposite is true in an epistemological sense. Thus, to understand what it means to describe learning, we must base our analysis on the consideration of how the assessment of whether individuals are in a state where they have learned something (i.e., a state where learning has been achieved) is constructed.

The core criteria of such assessments seem to be "change" and "persistence" (cf. Koschmann, 2013; Nishizaka, 2006). When an individual is said to have learned something, an assumption is that a change has occurred, and it endures to a certain extent. However, assessments of the achievement of learning are more complex than these core criteria suggest because they include many other criteria, such as the following:

Location of change: Changes can occur either in the invisible mental processes (e.g., schema or cognitive structure) of an actor or in his/her observable acts; in the latter case, analysts can either focus on an individual's acts or consider the related acts of others and the overall contexts in which those acts occur.

Identification of sameness: The identification of sameness precedes the perception of changes: individuals recognize multiple acts as tokens of the same activity type before perceiving a change (cf. Berducci, 2011; Koschmann, 2013). Additionally, the achievement of learning is often assessed in terms of the degree of sameness between changed acts and past acts of legitimate others (e.g., teachers).

Direction of change: The concept of learning often presupposes quantitative or qualitative

improvements, namely, changes to a "desirable" state. The conventional approach to L2 learning reveals this implicit premise (e.g., directions from interlanguage to target language).

Biological/Physiological basis of change: The presence or absence of a biological or physiological basis of change can be a criterion to distinguish learning from changes occurred by "native response tendencies, maturation, or temporary states of the organism (e.g., fatigue, drugs, etc.)" (Hilgard & Bower, 1966, p. 2).

Intentionality/Consciousness: The presence or absence of intentionality or consciousness can be used as a criterion to distinguish learning from acquisition, as shown in traditional SLA studies (cf. Krashen, 1981).

Degree of persistency: The duration of changed states can differ, affecting the assessment of the achievement of learning; changes of limited duration are often assessed as having occurred by chance.

All these criteria demonstrate how the assessment of whether certain acts constitute learning can be arbitrary and highlight the importance of the metapragmatic dimension: analysts assess learning in the context of their unclarified assumptions.

SLA research as a metapragmatic practice

Recent SLA studies from the social perspective have borrowed definitions or criteria from various social theories of learning and have described L2 learning in social interactions by applying their terms: studies based on the framework of situated learning have described observed changes of L2 learners as "increasing participation in communities of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 49) (Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Young & Miller, 2004); studies inspired by sociocultural theory have discussed language learning in terms of changes from other-regulation to self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006); studies based on language socialization have described L2 learning as socialization through persistent participation in routine settings (Mickan, 2006; Ohta, 1999). Meanwhile, SLA studies that apply CA, which does not explicitly define what learning is (cf. Brouwer & Wagner, 2004), have attempted to understand L2 learning in terms of organizing social actions (Firth & Wagner, 2007; Kasper, 2009; Svennevig, 2018) or conceptualized it as the development of "interactional competence" (Markee, 2008; Nguyen, 2011). In this manner, various social theories have guided SLA researchers in the actual illustrations of L2 learning and how to describe this process. In other words, the various social theories have functioned as metadiscourses in the metapragmatic practice of describing L2 learning.

However, these studies have not fully identified the ideological dimensions of the theories on which they are based. For example, Wertsch (1991) implies that the conceptualization of development in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has ethnocentric ideologies in its background; as for situated learning

and L2 socialization, they have been criticized for their conceptualization of learning (or socialization) as a linear, one-way process among asymmetrical participants and insufficient attention paid to conflicts (cf. He, 2003; O'Connor, 2003); CA has been criticized for its understanding of narrowly conceptualized context (Blommaert, 2005) and its "ideological view of the social world" (Billig, 1999, p. 543). Thus, when SLA researchers rely on such theories in describing L2 learning, they are inevitably involved in reproducing specific perspectives.

Additionally, the main focus of most studies of SLA has been the aspect of the "process," whereas the aspect of the "state" has rarely been discussed. This lack of consideration implies an epistemological limitation of the SLA literature because describing a process of learning always presupposes certain assumptions about the state in which it has been achieved. Furthermore, the insufficient critical reflection in SLA studies can be partially explained by the lack of consideration of the "state" because focusing on it can lead to the question on what basis do we stipulate the state in which an individual has (not) learned something.

Meanwhile, some SLA studies allude to innate problematics in describing learning by researchers. For example, Larsen-Freeman (2006), acknowledging the complexity and non-linearity of L2 learning, points out the unclarity of assessing "lasting development" from "messy little details" in behaviors of L2 learners (p. 613). In addition, in his ecological-semiotic approach to language learning, van Lier 50 (2011) shows his emergentist view on L2 learning where language development is understood as a process that emerges through "never finished but always remain[ing] en route" semiosis (p. 388). Examining SLA research from the perspective of metapragmatics takes such views further to shed light on the inherently sociocultural aspects of describing L2 learning.

The case: Employing metapragmatics in describing L2 learning

Analytical focus

In the previous section, we demonstrated how the concept of metapragmatics illuminates the inherently sociocultural nature of the description of learning. Next, we examine how this concept can be utilized to describe L2 learning in social interactions.

As mentioned before, metapragmatics is always in play with the pragmatics of discursive interaction. Thus, we hypothesized that in a social interaction that seems relevant to learning from an analyst's standpoint, the metapragmatic functions that lead to the idea that learning is occurring can be identified. Describing learning in this manner differs from that of conventional SLA research, where generally, an analyst relies on particular metadiscourses (i.e., existing theories) to assess who learned what. In contrast, an analyst's work following this approach is to describe metapragmatics *in* the interaction. More specifically, the analyst describes the metapragmatic practices of participants through which they indexically create a state in which an individual has learned something.

The analytic focus here is on the aspect of the "state" rather than on the "process." This focus

on the state has been inspired by several CA studies of learning that understand learning as a phenomenon "achieved" through interaction. For example, Nishizaka (2006) analyzed a four-year-old child's violin lesson. During the lesson, the child performed what the teacher had instructed in a lesson conducted one month prior. She bowed as she had been taught, and the teacher gave her a positive verbal evaluation. Nishizaka pointed out that the process was publicly displayed and was thus accessible to all the participants and that learning was "ascribed" to the child through this sequence of interaction (i.e., "showing-paying attention-evaluating"). This result suggests an important point: any observable change per se cannot be regarded (by analysts) as the achievement of learning.

Additionally, Berducci (2011) analyzed micro-longitudinal interactions in which a biochemist taught lab techniques to a technician. Although the study's main focus was the social nature of the "process" of learning, the author articulated how his perception of the achievement of learning had been established (e.g., with reference to the publicly displayed acts of participants and the nature of the context). Koschmann (2013) proposed a similar argument: "[o]ur task as investigators is not to certify that learning has occurred, for that is a member's matter, but rather to give an account of just *how* members conduct the investigations into the regularities [...]" (pp. 1039-1040). Taking an emic perspective of participants, these studies suggest that an examination of how learning is "achieved" through interaction would result in a new description of L2 learning.[6]

Here, we raise two points regarding Nishizaka's (2006) analysis. First, Nishizaka analyzed an institutional situation in which a participant's identity as a teacher or learner was foregrounded, and the achievement of learning was their greatest concern. However, learning is a ubiquitous phenomenon that 51 occurs in settings other than explicitly educational ones (Eskildsen, 2018; Firth & Wagner, 2007; Svennevig, 2018) where participants' orientation to acts concerned with learning is not explicitly demonstrated (cf. Nguyen, 2011). Thus, examining other types of interactions can lead to a deeper understanding of learning. Further, Nishizaka analyzed the interaction where learning was "ascribed," without examining subsequent interactions. However, from the perspective of metapragmatics, the achievement of learning should be understood as indeterminant or defeasible (Silverstein, 1992; Wortham, 2003). To illustrate, as long as the achievement of learning emerges through a dialectical process of pragmatics and metapragmatics (see Section 2), it can be refuted or defeasible in subsequent interactions. Thus, a sufficient amount of longitudinal data is required to capture the dynamics of the achievement of learning.

Analytical tool

This section examines how L2 learning is achieved through social interaction, that is, how a state in which "an individual has learned something" is indexically created through the metapragmatics of interaction. The analytical tool employed is the concept of "frame" (Goffman, 1974).

Frames are the organizational principles that define everyday situations and answer the question "What is going on here and now?" For example, the frame of "class" denotes children sitting at

desks as students and an adult standing before them as a teacher and their acts as linked to such roles to the best extent possible. A frame allows other frames to be inserted therein and thus may have a "laminated" structure (Goffman, 1974). For instance, when students playfully imitate their teacher, this can be understood as a joke, with reference to the frame of "play" inserted in the frame of "class." In this way, frames function metapragmatically, providing contextual basis for interpreting an action's meaning.

A metapragmatic frame is mostly indexed not by utterances explicitly referring to it but indirectly by a poetic pattern (cf. Silverstein, 1993; Wortham, 2003) interwoven with various indexical signs related to, for example, the forms and contents of utterances, sequential organization of interaction, and arrangement of participants and artifacts. This pattern indexes a particular frame as relevant, and in turn, the meaning of the signs that comprise the pattern is regimented by that frame. Thus, in terms of metapragmatics, we can conjecture that learning in interaction is achieved not only through specific acts oriented to it (e.g., a reflexive metapragmatic sequence of "showing-paying attention to-evaluating" in Nishizaka's [2006] analysis) but also, even more generally, in an indirect manner, namely, by various signs in the interaction indexing metapragmatic frames that enable interpretations as such.

Participants and procedure

This study analyzed word learning in a series of Japanese-English language exchange conversations that were held 12 times in 4 months by two female L2 Japanese intermediate-level speakers, Kahi and Yuna, and two native Japanese speakers, Sami and the only male participant, Taku. All the participants were undergraduates from the same university in Tokyo and were gathered by the author as individuals who wanted opportunities to speak their L2. Kahi and Yuna, whose native language was Korean, were proficient speakers of English with more than three years of experience of sojourning abroad while attending high school. Both students were enrolled in the university's English degree course, where most classes were offered in English. Sami and Taku were normal Japanese degree course students with an advanced level of English. Kahi and Yuna were friends and Sami and Taku were acquaintances, but the non-native speakers and native speakers were not acquainted. All the participants provided informed consent, and their identities and personal data remain confidential.

The conversations were held in a seminar room at the university. Participants sat face-to-face at a square table, with a 360° camera and a voice recorder installed in the center. All conversations were recorded; the second conversation has only audio data because of a camera malfunction. The conversations were transcribed based on the recorded video and audio data, and in the analysis, both the transcriptions and video data were used.

The language exchange sessions were free conversations with a friendly atmosphere, not explicit L2 learning-teaching sessions. We did observe cases of word teaching and learning sequences, but all of them were embedded in conversations on the main topics, as observed in language learning "in

the wild" (Eskildsen, 2018; Svennevig, 2018).

The duration of the participants' conversations was 1 hour each, and during the first meeting, they decided to allocate 30 minutes to each Japanese and English. Negotiations about switching languages were observed in each session, and, except for the first meeting, the Japanese verb *kirikaeru* (W ¦9^^5, 'to switch' or 'to change') was used in all of the negotiations. The word was never used outside of the negotiation phase. Our analysis focuses on the longitudinal changes in interactions concerning the use of the verb *kirikaeru*, with particular focus on the acts of Kahi, one of the two non-native speakers. Although the participants had different cultural backgrounds, significant differences in their ways of interacting that might have influenced the analysis were not observed.

Longitudinal analysis

The word *kirikaeru* was first observed in Sami's suggestion, *sorosoro, kirikaeru?* ('shall we switch?'). At that time, Kahi had only partial (or wrong) knowledge of the word. However, she understood it through the following repair sequence and then incorporated it into her own utterances (for readability, in the following excerpts, we denote each participant using the first initial of their name and the first initial of the native language; for example, "Sj" denotes Sami, whose native language is Japanese) (see Appendix for symbols and abbreviations used).

Second Conversation (audio data only)

01^Sj: sorosoro, kirikaeru?

soon switch

shall we switch?

02 Tj: ima nan[(pun)

now what minutes

what's the time

03 Sj: [san ji han.

three o'clock half *3:30*

04 Kk: kirikaeru= switch *kirikaeru*

05 Tj: =kirikaema(su ka.)

switch-POL Q

shall we switch.

06^Yk: kirikkaeru? ?

switch

kirikkaeru?

07^Kk: kirikare- kirikaeru wa: fuku wo kaeru no: imi?

switch TOP cloth ACC change LK meaning

does kirikaeru mean changing clothes?

08 Sj: [un? uun? kirikaeru wa:suitchi?

huh? no switch TOP switch

huh? no. kirikaeru is to switch?

09 Tj: [kiri- un? kirikaeru wa (..)

huh? switch TOP *huh? kirikaeru is*

10 Yk: suit[chi gaswitch NOM *to switch is*

11 Kk: [*kirikae^ ru\::* ((Korean intonation of understanding))

switch

oh, kirikaeru

12 Tj: fuku wa, futsuni fuku wo kaeru.

cloth TOP normally cloth ACC change

in case of clothes, it is just fuku wo kaeru

13 Sj: kigaeru.

change clothes

kigaeru

14 Tj: kigae[ru a change clothes oh *kigaeru oh*

15 Kk: [a, kigaeru. a::

oh change clothes oh

oh, kigaeru oh

((omission of 33 seconds of conversation))

16 Kk: ima kara eigo de

now from English with

from now,

16 Sj: u:n.

hm

18^Kk: ki::ri:kaeru

switch
((we 're gonna)) switch to English

19 Yk: kiri[kaeru
switch
kirikaeru

20 Sj: [@@@ @@@

21^Kk: [@@@ kirikaema[fshoi:[:
switch-POL-VOL
let's switch

22 Yk: [@@ [@

23 Sj: [kirikaemasho;:[@@
switch-POL-VOL
let's switch

24 Kk: [@@@@

In this conversation, at least three frames are relevant. The first is the frame of "language exchange." This frame explains the situation in which the participants join the conversation in Japanese and English and negotiate which language to use. The second frame is that of "teaching/learning" inserted into the frame of "language exchange." This frame is indexed by the repair sequence related to the word *kirikaeru* through which the participants' asymmetrical identities of "L2 learner" and "native speaker" became relevant (cf. Eskildsen, 2018; Kasper, 2004). The third frame is that of "play," which is observed after the repair sequence. This frame is indexed by Kahi's utterance with a unique intonation (*kirikaema]sho[::*) (21), the subsequent laughter of the participants, and Sami's *kirikaemasho^::* (23) that is, considering ordinary Japanese intonation, a mimic of Kahi's utterance. The participants' activities of teaching/learning and play centered on the word *kirikaeru*, and the repetition of the word plays an important role in indexing both the frames of "teaching/learning" and "play."[7]

Here, Kahi is demonstrating ownership of the word by using it, integrating it into a new syntactic structure, and laminating it with her affective stance. Thus, we may state that Kahi has "learned" a new word. However, in terms of the achievement of learning, we cannot hastily conclude as such. There is no instance of the ascription of learning by Sami and Taku (e.g., positive evaluation) (cf. Nishizaka, 2006), and Kahi did not demonstrate her ability to use the word consistently. Thus, in an interactional sense, whether Kahi has learned the word remains undetermined.

After 1 week, Kahi attempted to use the word *kirikaeru* again in the phase of switching languages.

Third conversation (1 week later)

01 Yk: jik,ka::::n *eotteog[hai? eigo? time what should I do English

time, what should I do, English?

02 Kk: [ei- ei- *eou:ya

wow

03 Sj: are? eigo::

hm? English

hm? English

04--Kk: [ima kara eigo [de

now from English with

from now, to English

05 Yk: [eigo @[@@

English

English

06 Sj: [eigo de chotto shaberu.((with a smile))

English with little talk

((we're gonna)) speak in English a little

07-Kk: [kaekiri? ((points at Sj with her index finger with a smile))

switch-VS

kaekiri?

08 Yk: [a, ima kara

oh now from *oh, from now*

09 (0.5)

10 Kk: [kirikae.

switch-VS

kirikae

11 Sj: [kirikae. ((with a smile))

switch-VS

kirikae

12 Tj: kiri[kae @@

switch-N

kirikae

13^ Yk: [ka@e[kiri @@

switch-VS

kaekirj

14^Sj: [kiri[kae ((twists her right hand))@@

switch-VS
kirikae

15 Kk: [kirikae[@@@[@@[@@@
switch-VS
kirikae

16 Sj: [@@@

17 Tj: [ka[ekiri
switch-VS
kaekiri

18 Yk: [kirikae @@@
switch-VS
kirikae

19 Sj: kae[kiri
switch-VS
kaekiri

20 Kk: [a, kirikae:=
switch-VS
kirikae

21 Sj: =kirikae.
switch-VS
kirikae

22^Kk: kirikaeru:: kirikaema^sho;:[@@@[@@@
switch switch-POL-VOL
kirikaeru let's switch

23 Sj: [@@@

24 Yk: [kaekirimasho @@@
switch-POL-VOL
let's switch

25 Kk: [kaekirimasho? @@
switch-POL-VOL
let's switch?

26 Sj: [@@@@

In the negotiation of switching languages initiated by Yuna, Kahi said *ima kara eigo de, kaekiri?* ('from now, switch to English?') and asked for confirmation (see Kahi's gesture when pointing to Sami in line 07). Immediately, Kahi observed her mistake and corrected it without assistance (10). Her mistake caused repetitions and the laughter of the others.

By requesting confirmation, Kahi indexed the continuity with the prior conversation and thus

the frame of "teaching/learning." However, the concern here is not merely a frame of "teaching/learning." Judging from Kahi's gesture and smile, she seems not to be inviting Sami to teach her the right form but to be appealing somewhat playfully to her that she remembers the word (although she did not). Furthermore, the other participants' reactions to Kahi's mistake (laughter and repetitions of the wrong word form) indicate that they were not treating Kahi's error as a mere object of correction.

In Line 22, Kahi said *kirikaema\sho[*: ('Let's switch') with the same intonation as in the second conversation, which provoked Sami laughter. In Line 24, Yuna intentionally incorporated Kahi's error into her utterance of the suggestion of switching (*kaekirimasho*), and Kahi also laughed and repeated it (25). In this excerpt, again, Kahi used the word *kirikaeru* in the frame of "play."

The subsequent two points deserve further examination. First, the series of repetitions of the word observed between Lines 07 and 21 were all in the form of a verb stem that does not contain deictic elements, such as tense, modality, or mood.[8] Here, the use of the verb stem is not indicative of using the word in a contextualized manner (as an utterance of suggesting switching languages) but of the orientation to the word form, namely, a metasemantic orientation (Silverstein, 1993). Second, in Line 14, Sami's gesture of twisting her right hand (representing the meaning of *kirikaeru*) is notable. The meaning of the word had been explained in the prior session, and Kahi used it with an appropriate understanding of its meaning (but in the wrong form). Here, Sami's gesture is semantically redundant. Sami seems to be treating Kahi as an individual who has not fully learned the word and was helping her use the word properly (see Svennevig [2018] for a similar use of an iconic gesture that orients to an activity of "teaching a new word"). This interpretation is supported, because Sami's gesture occurred after the word was repeated many times, including by her.

Fourth Conversation (1 week later)

01^Sj: sorosoro, (1) ((twists her right hand))

soon

02 kirikaema[su ka ((with a smile))

switch-POL Q

shall we switch?

03 Kk: [kirikae

switch-VS

kirikae

04 Yk: [°kirikae°((with a smile))

switch-VS

kirikae

05^Kk: kirikae[ma T sho J: ((looks at Yk and raises her right fist with a smile))

switch-POL-VOL *let's switch*

06 Tj: [@@

07 Yk: @

08 Sj: kirikaemasu ka. ((with a smile))

switch-POL Q

shall we switch

09 Kk: ha:i.

okay

The negotiation of switching languages in the fourth conversation was much simpler than those in the previous conversations. In Lines 01 and 02, after gesturing by twisting her right hand, Sami suggested switching to English by saying *kirikaemasuka* ('shall we switch'). In the middle of this utterance, she smiled. This smile can be interpreted as indicating her expectation of the frame of "play" to be evoked by the use of the word *kirikaeru*, because no other contextual clues lead to the interpretations except the one presented here. As in the third conversation, Kahi and Yuna repeated Sami's utterance by using the verb stem *kirikae* (03 and 04). Kahi then looked at Yuna and said *kirikaema]shd[:* ('Let's switch') with a playful intonation and a gesture of pushing up the fist (05), evoking laughter and smiles from the other participants. After the second and third conversations, the word *kirikaeru* became associated with the frame of "play," rather than being treated as a mere object of learning; it became an indexical cue of the frame of "play" and thus performed as a reflexive metapragmatic sign.

Fifth Conversation (1 week later)

01 Kk: ima, [e- eigo de

now English with

now, to English

02 Sj: [nanka eigo ni shita

H English to change-PAST-MOD

03 hou ga 1 [ka na

side NOM good Q IP

well, is it better switch to English?

04^Kk: [kirikae?

switch-VS *kirikae?*

05 Tj: so desu [(ne) so COP-POL IP *you're right.*

06 Sj: [kirikaeru. ((looks at Kk and smiles))

switch *kirikaeru*

07^Kk: kirika- [oo:: ((clenches her fists with a smile)) *wow*

08^Tj: [kiri- [oo: @@ ((with a smile))

wow

09^Sj: [wa:: ((gesture of clapping))

wo::w

10 Kk: [kirikaeru.

switch

kirikaeru

11 Sj: kirikae [ru.

Switch

kirikaeru

12^Kk: [ha::ha::[ha:ha@k@i[rikaeru ka tna:@:@[@

switch Q IP

13 ((looking at Yk with a loud voice))

ha::ha::ha:ha Shall I switch?

14 Sj: [@@@ [kirikaeru [@@@

switch

kirikaeru

In Line 04, for the first time, Kahi used the verb stem *kirikae* in the correct form. As in the third conversation, she used the phase of negotiation of switching languages as an opportunity to illustrate her memory. When Sami confirmed that Kahi had used the correct form (06), Kahi struck a victory pose while saying *oo::* ('wow') (07). She looked at Yuna and said *ha::ha::ha:ha* in a loud voice, as if to brag (12). Next, Kahi laughed and said *kirikaeruka]na::* ('Shall I switch?') in a satisfied tone. Taku reacted to her by saying *oo:* ('wow') (08). Sami also made a gesture of clapping while saying *wa::* ('wo::w') (09). These acts of the participants are reminiscent of a quiz game. Kahi reinterpreted the

phase of switching languages as a quiz given to herself, acting as the participant who presented a correct answer. Additionally, Sami and Taku played the role of the audience who cheered for Kahi (notably, Sami did not truly applaud but made a gesture of applause without sound). This pseudo-frame indexically brought about by the participants' hilarious acts can be called the frame of "quiz game."

The excerpt from the fifth conversation is reminiscent of Nishizaka's (2006) ascription of learning; Kahi publicly displayed that she could use the word correctly, and Sami and Taku paid attention to her utterance and evaluated it positively. They acknowledged that Kahi had learned the word. Unlike the case analyzed by Nishizaka, however, this sequence indexed not so much the frame of "teaching/learning" as the frame of a "quiz game" in which the participants played their pseudo-roles. Furthermore, the ascription of learning here does not guarantee the complete achievement of learning, as will be observed in the later conversations below.

Sixth to Ninth Conversations

Because of the limited space, we will omit the excerpts of the sixth to ninth conversations and summarize the noticeable changes observed in them. These four conversations generally presented simpler looks compared to the previous ones (with eight lines of scripts for the sixth, seventh, and ninth conversations each and ten lines for the eighth conversation). In these conversations, all suggestions for switching languages using the verb *kirikaeru* were initiated by Sami.

In the seventh conversation, two noticeable changes occurred. The first is the disappearance of Sami's gesture of twisting her hand, which was observed in all conversations except for the fifth (and the second conversation without video data). The gesture had not been observed since then, implying Sami's recognition that Kahi and Yuna already knew the meaning of the word. The second is the disappearance of the use of the verb stem (*kirikae*). As mentioned, the use and repetition of the verb stem was related to the participants' orientation to the word form and evoked the frames associated with it. The verb stem was not observed in the eighth and ninth conversations, indicating that Yuna and Kahi had become able to use the word in its correct form.

In the ninth conversation, the negotiation about switching languages became more succinct, where Sami's suggestion (*kirikaeru?*) was accepted with simple responses by Yuna (°*kirikaeru?*° *un.* 'shall we switch? yes') and Kahi (*un. sodane:* 'yes. yeah'). There, no attention was paid to the word, and no insertive frame was indexed.

Tenth Conversation (1 week later from the ninth conversation)

0)1^Kk: ki-kirikaeru?

switch

shall we switch?

02 Sj: kiri[kaeru? switch

shall we switch?

03 Kk: [kirikae[ru?

switch

shall we switch?

04 Yk: [nan: ji=

what o'clock

what time...

05 Sj: =so da ne

so COP IP

yeah

06 Yk: a:[(..) *oh*

07 Kk: [ima sanjup pun.

now thirty minutes

it's now 30 minutes

08 Sj: u:n.

hm

09 Kk: un.

hm

In the tenth conversation, for the first time, Kahi used the word *kirikaeru* in the correct verb form as an utterance proposing to switch languages, rather than as a repetition of other participants' utterances. In response to Kahi's *ki-kirikaeru?* ('shall we switch?') (01), Sami repeated and asked back (02), evoking another repetition from Kahi (03). The negotiation of switching languages was completed with Sami's consent (*sodane* 'yeah') (03) and several following turns. Notably, compared with the fifth conversation, no evaluative reaction to Kahi's correct use of the word was elicited. Kahi also did not show any sense of accomplishment or satisfaction. Kahi's *kirikaeru?* was no longer worth noticing for all the participants. Such an absence of attention indicates that the participants expected Kahi to use the word properly. She acted as a person who had already "learned" it, and the others treated her accordingly. Thus, here, the state in which Kahi had already learned the word was indexically created by the absence of attention; nonetheless, this does not guarantee the "complete" achievement of learning.

Eleventh Conversation (3 weeks later)

01 Sj: ((checks the time on the video camera))

02 Yk: a, furikae.:

oh look. back-VS

oh, furikae

03^Kk: furi- *ani kiri[kae? ((looks at Yk))

no switch-VS

furi- no, kirikae?

04 Yk: [ki- kiri[kae @@

switch-VS

kirikae

05 Sj: [kirikaeru?

switch

kirikaeru?

0 6 3': [o::

wo:w

07 Kk: kiri[kaeru? ((looks at Sj and Tj in order)) switch *kirikaeru?*

08 Tj: [kiri[kaeru.

switch

kirikaeru

09 Yk: [wasure@(ta) [kirikaeru?

forget-PAST switch

I forgot.

kirikaeru?

10 Kk: [kirikaeru?=

switch

kirikaeru?

11 Sj: =°kirikaeru°

switch

kirikaeru

After observing Sami check the time, Yuna attempted to suggest switching languages for the first time, but she did not use the correct word (*furikae* is the stem of the verb *furikaeru*, which means 'to look back'). Instead, Kahi presented the correct word (in the form of verb stem) in Line 03. Here, Yuna and Kahi are in different situations. In contrast to Yuna, who explicitly admitted to having forgotten the word (09), 63 Kahi demonstrated that she still remembered it after three weeks of blanks. However, Kahi was not treated as having completely learned the word. First, her correction was accompanied by a rising intonation that can be interpreted as her uncertainty of the form, which, together with Yuna's error, invited Sami's presenting the correct form (05). Additionally, Taku demonstrated an evaluative attitude (*o::*) toward Kahi (06). Here, we observe, again, the use of a verb stem, a repair sequence, repetitions of the word, and an evaluative attitude. Again, all these signs index the frame of "teaching/learning," which is relevant for Yuna and Kahi. Thus, this instance of interaction indicates that Kahi's state of having learned the word that had been achieved through the prior conversations (especially the tenth conversation) was indirectly and partially denied again.

Twelfth Conversation (1 week later)

01 Sj: kirikaeru?=

switch

shall we switch?

02 Kk: =un. kirikaeru. un un. nijup pun datta yo.

okay switch yes yes twenty minutes COP-PAST IP

okay. let's switch. yes, yes. it was already 20 minutes.

03 Tj: [nijup pun tte [hayai desu ne twenty minutes TOP fast COP-POL IP

20 minutes is so fast

04 Sj: [un.

hm

05 Kk: [un un un.

hm hm hm

06 Yk: u:n. @@ *hmm*

In this last conversation, Kahi answered Sami's proposal *kirikaeru?* (01) with a succinct utterance of *un. kirikaeru.* ('okay. let's switch') (02). Her repetition of the word served as an acceptance of the proposal without further implications. The word *kirikaeru* was not treated as noteworthy, indicating once again the participants' recognition that Kahi already knew the word and could properly use it. Here, Kahi's learning of the word was non-explicitly and indexically achieved again.

Discussion

In summary, in our longitudinal analysis of the language exchange conversations, we identified three frames (each not strictly distinct from the others) inserted in the frame of "language exchange": "teaching/learning," "play," and "quiz game." Those frames were indexed by patterns that consisted of various acts by the participants such as repeating the word *kirikaeru*, using the verb stem, repairs, smiles 64 and laughter, and gestures. As the sessions proceeded, such acts (and those frames indexed by them) disappeared gradually and perceptibly. Thus, the last conversation had only a brief illustration; no repairs, evaluations, or laughter were observed; there were only utterances for negotiation of switching languages. The word *kirikaeru* (and its use) became embedded in the context of switching languages and was backgrounded. Through this process, Kahi (and not necessarily Yuna) became indexed as an individual who could use the word appropriately. Thus, we conclude that the metapragmatic frame that indexically created the state in which Kahi had already learned the word was not a specific frame but the transition of frames, namely, the transition to the increasing absence of insertive frames that focalize the learning object and related acts.

This analysis demonstrates the dynamics of metapragmatic practice in social interaction regarding learning. As mentioned before, Nishizaka (2006) presented an important point that learning is "achieved" through interaction. Adding to this point, our analysis demonstrates that a state where "an individual has learned something" is only temporary because it occurs in the ebb and flow of interaction. Learning, once ascribed to an individual through interactional sequences, such as "showing-paying attention-evaluating," can be denied in subsequent interactions. Furthermore, in contrast to Nishizaka's (2006) analysis, where learning was considered to be achieved when participants oriented to the learning objects and related acts, our analysis confirms that it is achieved in a more indirect (indexical) manner, namely, through the gradual absence of such orientation.

In this manner, the analytical concept of metapragmatics can capture learning in interactions as an inherently dynamic, contextual, and indexical practice that always allows room for defeasibility. This does not necessarily mean the same thing as the nonlinear process of learning, as argued by previous studies (Firth & Wagner, 2007; Hall, 2018; Kramsch, 1986; Larsen-Freeman, 2006, 2012). As discussed above, identifying the processes of learning (regardless of being linear or nonlinear) presupposes certain assumptions about a state in which it has been successfully achieved. Since such assumptions are ideological, culture-specific, and arbitrary in nature, they can always be refuted and modified, which further results in denying the status of acts that have been considered embodying the process of learning. In other words, the process of learning is not merely nonlinear but is essentially defeasible, depending on the treatment of the resultant state. The analysis of this study indicates that such refutes, or modifications of the state of having learned something also occur through metapragmatics in social interactions, as observed especially in the eleventh conversation where Kahi's state of having learned the word *kirikaeru* was inexplicitly denied by interactions of the participants (including herself). This shows that participants of interaction as well as researchers are actively

involved in the dialectic practice of metapragmatics.

Conclusion: The "meta" of metapragmatics in SLA research

This study began by noting that SLA research needs a comprehensive theoretical epistemological framework that captures both object-level social interactions in which L2 learning occurs and meta-level practices of analysts describing it. This article attempted to demonstrate that metapragmatics can comprise such a comprehensive framework. What was common in both the meta- and object-level considerations herein is that stipulating what counts as learning results from socially embedded metapragmatic practice. This is a reminder for researchers of SLA that they are inevitably involved in the social practices of 65 language use, and this study shows that they can analyze, on the same theoretical plane, their practices along with the practices of L2 learners under investigation.

Here, however, we must discuss an anticipated concern, that is, that invoking metapragmatics to study L2 learning is in itself a metapragmatic practice. This study proceeded by recognizing that any attempt to describe learning is a metapragmatic practice that reflects specific perspectives and ideologies. Invoking the theory of metapragmatics is no exception. For example, the claim made in this study that learning is achieved through the metapragmatics of interactions is explicitly metapragmatic. The analysis of L2 learning utilizing the concept of "frame" is also a metapragmatic practice that regulates the meaning of the interaction with reference to the conceptual frame of L2 learning, restraining other diverse meanings in the interaction. Furthermore, the theory of metapragmatics reflects specific perspectives: the linguistic anthropological and Peircean world views. However, the theory of metapragmatics is fundamentally different from other theories in that it enables researchers to examine their studies in the same manner as they examine the objects of their studies. Metapragmatics is a theory of reflexive (self-referential) modes of signs (Lucy, 1993) and is thus capable of providing a theoretical perspective and conceptual tools for researchers to examine their research, including research based on the same concept. In other words, metapragmatics can provide reflexivity (in Clifford and Marcus's [1986] critical sense) to the research of L2 learning.

Metapragmatics can open new lines of further SLA research: (a) investigations of diverse metapragmatic processes through which learning is achieved; (b) clarifications of what types of metadiscourse (ideologies) articulate the metapragmatics of learning and how; and (c) examinations of the indexical entailment (Silverstein, 2003) of such metapragmatic practices. These lines of research will elucidate the dynamic relationship between the object- and meta-level practices regarding learning, namely, the dialectic process of pragmatics and metapragmatics. In this manner, metapragmatics will lead to a deeper understanding of the inherently social nature of L2 learning and provide a richer and more self-reflexive sense of what is involved in the research of learning.

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Notes

1. For example, CA, a methodology for which the objective is to clarify the social organization of "talk-in-interaction," is unsuitable for examining the practice of research, which is mainly based on written text. Further, other social theories of learning, such as the sociocultural theory, situated learning, and language socialization, because of their specified goals to explain what learning (or development) is or how it occurs, have limited scopes to explain various social practices (e.g., describing learning).
2. Here, the terms "object-level" and "meta-level" of language use (or social practice) are used in the sense of Jakobson's (1987[1960]) distinction of two levels of language: the "object language" and "metalanguage." To borrow Mertz & Yovel's (2009)'s words, "[object language] is used to talk of 'things'and characterizes most of natural language, while [metalanguage] is used to talk of language and characterizes (according to Tarski) logic—and obviously much of linguistic discourse" (p. 251). This distinction was extended to the distinction between "pragmatics" and "metapragmatics" by Silverstein (1976, 1993).
3. Note that what is relevant here is Peirce's "semiotics" that is well known for its trichotomy of signs (i.e., icon, index, and symbol), not Saussurean "semiology" whose primary concern is signs based on arbitrary and conventional (i.e., "symbolic" in Peircean terminology) relationships between *signifiant* and *signifie.* Although these two theories of sign overlap in some ways, it is acknowledged that differences exist in terms of their scope and primary interests (Daylight, 2012).
4. In SLA studies, the term "metadiscourse" has often been utilized to examine academic writings of language learners (Kojima et al., 2019; Zarei & Mansoori, 2007) in the framework of "metadiscourse analysis" in which the term refers to "the commentary on a text made by its producer in the course of speaking or writing" (Hyland, 2017, p. 16). However, as noted below, the term is conceptualized in a different, or much broader way, in linguistic anthropological studies.
5. Nishizaka (2006) and Berducci (2011) have pointed out that "learning" constitutes two types of verbs, namely, the achievement verb and process verb (Ryle, 1963); the former describes the results of certain acts and the latter depicts the processes of certain acts.
6. However, describing learning using the concept of metapragmatics is not the same as CA's *emic* approach, since metapragmatics is an *analytical* concept applied from an analyst's perspective. This fact makes it possible to capture meta-level practices of analysts (as presented in the previous section) as well as object-level social interactions (as we will demonstrate subsequently).
7. As Jakobson (1987[1960], pp. 69-71) pointed out, repetition brings focus to the message itself. Repetition in discourse functions metapragmatically through constructing the cohesive (or poetic)

structure of text, which indexes relevant context (Silverstein, 1985).

8. From the form, *kirikae* can be interpreted not only as a stem of the verb *kirikaeru*, of which *-ru* is an inflecting ending but also as a nominal form of the verb. However, in this excerpt, there is no linguistic context where *kirikae* can be identified as a noun instead of a stem (e.g., *kirikae ga muzukasl* "switching is difficult"). The participants attempt to use the word as a verb, and it seems more appropriate to regard *kirikae* as the verb stem.

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Appendix

Transcript Conventions

[	the point at which overlapping talk starts
.	falling (final) intonation
,	slight rising intonation
?	rising intonation

n	marked shift in pitch elongation of a syllable
-	false start
=	no gap between the two lines
@	laugh
(1)	silence for one second
(..)	unclear or unintelligible speech
(word)	transcriber's doubt about a word
((word))	comments
°word°	noticeably quiet utterance
*word	Korean words
word.	grammatical or pragmatic error
ACC	Accusative
COP	Copular
H	Hesitation marker
IP	Interactional particle
LK	Linking nominal
MOD	Modifying form
NOM	Nominative
PAST	Past form
POL	Polite form
Q	Question marker
TOP	Topic marker
VOL	Volitional
VS	Verb stem