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Self-Access vs. Language Classes –a CHAT Analysis

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Similar to the traditional foreign language classroom, self-access language learning, though different in its approach, is also centered around the basic process of learning and acquiring proficiency in an L2. From the point of view of the learner, in either of the two environments, L2 becomes the focus of the process, which in the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) context translates to ‘object’.

At the end of the previous academic year (March, 2023), an interpretive study was conducted among last year’s fourth-year students who were frequent users of the Global Lounge (GL), the self-access center of a provincial university in Japan. Wishing to improve learners’ L2 proficiency, the GL offers learners the possibility to book sessions with a self-access educator.

The data was collected through open-ended questionnaires and follow-up, semi-structured interviews with three of the ten students who replied. One purpose of the study was to reveal the students’ views towards different aspects of their GL sessions as compared with their regular foreign language classes.

According to Engeström and Sannino (2021), “[t]he formation of minimally two activity systems connected by a partially shared object may be regarded as the prime unit of analysis for third-generation [CHAT].” Taking the sessions at the GL and the foreign language classes as two separate activity systems, in this presentation I will use the third-generation of CHAT as a theoretical framework to illustrate how the learners conceptualize the differences between the two, and how they view their role and the educators’ in each of them.

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