

D. LEARNER TYPES AND STYLES

Learning style refers to any individual's preferred ways of going about things. Types and styles are categorised in various different ways in the literature. Reid, (*1) for example, identifies the following 4 styles.

- **Visual** - some people learn primarily with their eyes.
- **Auditory** - depending on input via the ears.
- **Kinesthetic** - learning by experience or total physical involvement in a learning situation.
- **Tactile** - 'hands on' learning, such as building models, doing laboratory experiments etc.

Which style would you tend to prefer? Employing a combination of styles is likely to foster success. It has been suggested that all our basic senses-sight, smell, sound, touch and taste-should be stimulated when we learn a language. This helps to personalize the language learning experience and decreases the degree of detachment from it. It is no longer a case of simply reading inkmarks from the book or worksheet.

Nunam(*2) has a different approach to the categorizing of types to Reid which concentrate on perceptual learning channels. His types relate more to **preferred tasks or activities**.

1. 'Concrete' learners.

These learners tend to like games, pictures, films, video, using cassettes, talking in pairs and practising Japanese outside class.

2. 'Analytical' learners.

These learners like studying grammar, studying books in the foreign language and reading newspapers, studying alone, finding their own mistakes and working on problems set by the teacher.

3. 'Communicative' learners.

These students like to learn by watching, listening to native speakers, talking to friends in Japanese and watching television in Japanese, using Japanese out of class in shops, trains etc., learning new words by hearing them, and learning by conversations.

4. 'Authority-oriented' learners.

These learners prefer the teacher to explain everything, like to have their own textbook, to write everything in a notebook, to study grammar, learn by reading, and learn new words by seeing them.

Most learners would probably be a mixture of types with one type predominating.

A third approach to the question of learning styles and preferences is to consider whether you learn better when you work alone or in a group.

Personal application

1.The following Questionnaire is a simple attempt to discover what type of learner you are on a two category basis of **relaxed learner versus analytic learner**. Fill in the chart, add up your score and then read the comments given on the scores. (*3)

QUESTIONNAIRE

Tick your answers to these questions:	Usually	Some-times	Almost never	Don't know
1. Did/do you get good results in grammar tests?				
2. Do you get have a good memory for new words?				
3. Do you hate making mistakes?				
4. In class, do you get irritated if mistakes are not corrected?				
5. Is your pronunciation better when you read aloud than when you have a conversation?				
6. Do you wish you had more time to think before speaking?				
1. Did/Do you enjoy being in a class?				
8. Do you find it difficult to pick up more than two or three words of a new language when you are on holiday abroad?				
9. Do you like to learn new grammar rules, words, etc. by heart?				

KEY Your score

- 3 points for each `usually'
- 2 points for each `sometimes'
- 1 point: for each `almost never'or `never'
- 0 points for each `don't know'

Total score : points

Score: 23-27 points : analytic?

You feel it is very important to be accurate at all times. You are probably good at the sort of language learning where you need to think carefully about grammar, the meanings of words and their formation, your pronunciation, etc. This is very often the sort of language learning you do when you are in class or studying alone.

Generally, it seems that the more analytic you are, the better you are able to do this sort of language learning. However, you may be able to help yourself become an even more successful language learning. See the following tips.

You need to concentrate on improving your fluency by:

- trying to speak more by taking every opportunity you can to use the language. Try talking to English-speaking friends, tourists, etc. as often as possible.
- not worrying too much about your mistakes, as you may be too concerned with being accurate. Trying to be correct all the time is hard work and can stop you from communicating well. However, making mistakes is an important part of the learning process, and after you have spoken, you can usually remember some of your mistakes. This is the time to make a note to yourself to do something about them.
- depending on yourself, as outside the classroom you won't always have a dictionary or a teacher to help you. The people you speak to won't be listening for your mistakes, but for what you are trying to say, so have more confidence in yourself.

Score: 14-22 points: a mixture?

Perhaps you are lucky enough to be quite good at the type of learning described above, as well as at the type of learning described below. In fact, many people are a mixture, although you may find that you are closer to one type than the other.

You are fortunate because you may be in a better position to judge what type of learning is best for each situation, and then vary your strategy. This means that you have the potential to become an even more successful language learner. See the following tips.

You need to:

- analyse yourself because the more you know about yourself, the more easily you will be able to improve your language learning. Reading the comments for all the scores in this quiz should help you to decide what areas you need to concentrate on
- get the right balance by experimenting with different approaches to language learning activities. Try concentrating on either being fluent or being accurate. After a while, you will discover which approach works best for a certain activity. Ask your teacher if you need advice while you are learning.

Score: 9-13 points: relaxed?

You are probably good at 'picking up' languages without really making too much effort. You sometimes feel, however, that you should be learning more grammar rules, but you do not enjoy this and quickly lose interest. You like languages and enjoy communicating with people.

You have a positive attitude towards foreign languages, but you could probably become an even more successful language learner. See the following tips.

You need to:

- take time to learn by spending more time thinking about and practising things like grammar, pronunciation, etc. Try to organize a regular time for learning alone
- be self-critical by correcting yourself. You may not worry about making mistakes or even notice when you are making them. Try to become aware of the mistakes you make regularly and then make a conscious effort to do something about them.

Score: 0-8 points: not sure?

Your score does not mean that you are not a good language learner! It probably means that this is perhaps the first time you have ever thought about your feelings towards language learning. Maybe you are not yet fully aware of what you think and do when you are learning. To know more about how you learn can be very useful in helping you to become a more successful language learner.

2. Do you like learning

by memory	Yes/No
by problem solving	Yes/No
by getting information for yourself	Yes/No
by listening	Yes/No
by listening and taking notes	Yes/No
by reading and making notes	Yes/No
by repeating what you hear	Yes/No

3. Think of what activities you find or have found most helpful in your study of Japanese so far.

role play
language games
songs
memorizing conversations/dialogues
watching TV
using a textbook
listening to tapes

(add your own)

4. What aspects of learning Japanese are easy or difficult for you?

5. Do you have any idea why certain aspects of Japanese are particularly easy or difficult for you? (Particularly consider this question in the light of what you have read in this section about yourself and learner types and styles.)

Notes (for section D)

1. In Reid, J. M. 'The learning style preferences of ESL students'. *Tesol Quarterly* ; Vol.21 no 1 Mar 1987.
2. Nunam, D. Language Teaching Methodology - a textbook for teachers Prentice Hall 1991 p170
3. Taken from Sheerin, S. Self Access OUP 1989 p41-43.