



# Professor Yasunari HARADA

Professor of Faculty of Law  
Director of Institute for Digital Enhancement of Cognitive Development  
Waseda University



## ***Taking "Interaction" Seriously: how to engage Japanese learners of English in oral and/or written communication in college language classes***

### **Abstract:**

College English teachers in Japan face several obstacles when trying to get their students engage in communication in their language classes. For most high school students in Japan, their central objective in learning English is to get better scores in college entrance examinations. Upon entrance, they have lost their greatest motivation for continuing to learn English seriously. Throughout their school life from kindergarten to preparatory (cram) schools, they are taught to sit silent and obedient in class. Anyone who asks questions or express their opinions, especially those that are not expected by the teachers, are severely penalized sooner or later. In their Japanese classes, they have been taught to repeat the main-stream ideas and not to be original and creative, or logical and argumentative, or imaginative and persuasive. College English teachers have to organize their classes in such a way that those students unlearn most important things they have acquired during their 12 or more years of their school experiences, most importantly, in the way they deal with the English language, the way they interact with other students, and most importantly, the way they view what learning English is all about. In this talk, I will first present those problems and give you an overview of some of the activities in my English classes and go on to the data collection efforts that is going on for four years now and will continue for another four-year period, in which we gather and store electronic documents that those students create and revise during class and as homework plus audio and video recordings of those activities. On the one hand, those collections of data would form a basis for written and spoken learner corpus, from which we can extract linguistic characteristics of those learners' production in English. However, we will also be able to extract important insight into the way students motivate and help each other by engaging in a real-life communication, in English and Japanese. For instance, in most language, liberal arts and law courses offered in the undergraduate School of Law, where I teach, an average student would attend the classes regularly without making even a single new friend, which never happens in my classes. By engaging in various activities, in constantly changing groupings, students naturally get to know each other well, and by the end of the term, they will have some good friends and many new acquaintances. They also learn that speaking and writing in English with their peer classmate in mind, is fun rather than drudgery. Expressing their ideas and opinions, with concrete examples and/or reasons, become their second nature. And most if not all of those students learn that getting a better score is not all there is to learning English.

### **About the speaker:**

Yasunari HARADA is a Professor at Faculty of Law and Director at the Institute for Digital Enhancement of Cognitive Development at the Waseda University. Yasunari is also a President of Logico-Linguistics Society of Japan, as well as a PACLIC Steering Committee member. You may know more details about Yasunari at <http://www.f.waseda.jp/harada/profile09-e.html>

**Date:** March 23, 2010 (Tuesday)  
**Time:** 4:30p.m. – 5:30p.m.  
**Venue:** Swire Hall 2, Fung King Hey Building

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

**\* Light refreshments will be served after 4:15pm.**

