A Letter from the Editor

Friends and Colleagues,

Greetings! We hope this latest issue of *On CUE* finds you well. As usual, we have a diverse, full, and (we think) interesting assortment of articles for you. Here's a quick preview.

We offer two feature articles this time. First, **Blagoja Dimoski** goes beneath the surface of culture to examine the sources of miscommunication from a pragmatics perspective. He also offers a framework for helping students and teachers cope with challenges posed by cross-cultural differences.

Yoko Ichige trains her critical eye on the *Center Examination*. Looking closely at actual test questions, she demonstrates that the test lacks validity for assessment of communicative English ability—the stated goal of *Mombukagaku-sho* for English education at school.

In *Research Digest,* **Eddy White** revisits S.P. Corder's 1967 article, *The Significance of Learners' Errors*, and traces its impact on our field.

The *Opinion & Perspective* section is packed. First, **Tom Anderson** shares his surprising and inspiring experience of having a visually impaired student in class. Then, **James McCrostie** laments the emphasis on TOEIC preparation in university English classes. In response, **Robert Brock** and **Sarah Brock** offer alternative perspectives on TOEIC preparation.

Not to be outdone, the *Chalkface* section is equally loaded. First, **Jason Williams** provides a means of helping students find and make the most of opportunities for using English outside of the classroom. **David Prucha** follows with a method of using collages to raise awareness of global issues. Finally, **Andrew Woollock** offers a lesson in stimulus-based teaching in which the stimulus is particularly tasty.

For the more technically inclined, **Steven Snyder** presents software options and online resources for video projects in the *Cyber-pipeline* section.

And rounding out this issue is a review of the 2006 Pan-Sig Conference in Shizuoka by **Adam Murray.**

On to CUE business: As always, CUE needs your help. Your involvement makes us a stronger SIG. If you are heading to the JALT Conference in Fukuoka in November, why not stop by the CUE desk. Or better yet, attend the CUE Annual General Meeting on November 3rd at 1:50pm (Room AIM D). You can learn more about the workings of CUE and help us chart a course for the future. We'd love to see you!

Mike Hood
On CUE *Editor*

The Pragmatics of Misunderstandings in Japan: Pedagogical and Cultural Perspectives

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Feature Article: Dimoski

本論は、英語を母国語とするネイティブスピーカーと英語を話す日本人との間で、コミュニケーションの手法及び相手に期待する事柄の文化的差異が、誤解を始めとした様々な行き違いをもたらす仕組みについて考察する。こうした差異に対する認識を高め、それらが生み出す悪影響を最小限にするべく、本論は語用論および異文化分析手法に基づき、よくある誤解をもたらす原因の特定及びその解説を試みる。本論の知見が西洋人教師と日本人学生にとって、ひいては教室という範疇を超えて、教育的・社会的により深い相互理解を達成するための一助となれば幸いである。

As disimilar as they might at first appear, certain aspects of culture and icebergs share some surprising commonalities. First, we can liken the visible part of an iceberg to the visible aspects of culture (i.e., art, fashion, etc.) as well as human behavior (i.e., verbal and non-verbal communication styles). These visible aspects, however, are but a small part of a broader and deeper whole that ultimately supports and dictates that which we can observe. Second, because what lies below the surface is not immediately visible, indeed just as human attitudes, belief and value systems are concepts which, on their own, are not visible, this largely hidden component can be easily overlooked. When we begin to consider the multitude of icebergs that surround us in all their varying shapes and sizes, anyone attempting to navigate this cross-cultural sea would be sorely mistaken to judge another cultural group solely on what one can see.

Indeed, it is a lack of awareness of this hidden side of culture that can lead native speakers of English (NSE) and Japanese speakers of English (JSE) to form negative perceptions about each other. This needs to be acknowledged and addressed in the language classroom. As a language teacher and teacher trainer with experience working in contexts ranging from conversation schools to universities in Japan, not only have I witnessed countless incidents of cross-cultural misunderstandings, I have also experienced them personally. As educators and gatekeepers (individuals with decision-making powers), it is our responsibility to look deeper, below the obvious, and use our knowledge—not only to better understand our learners but also to empower them, that they might navigate safely through the sea of cross-cultural communication when we are no longer at their side to guide them.

To this end, this paper provides a critical survey of contemporary literature as well as supporting anecdotal evidence to address issues that affect Western language teachers and their students in Japan in an attempt to raise awareness of pedagogical and socio-cultural issues that scholars concur, and I have come to believe, are central to building a conducive language learning environment and positive coexistence within the class-

room and beyond.

After an initial overview of Japanese society, I will discuss (a) the pragmatics of misunderstandings, (b) the underlying rules that govern Western and Japanese social interactions, including perceptions of silence, and (c) the pedagogical and social implications of all the above.

Japan – A Cultural and Educational Overview

According to Sapir (1921), culture is a "socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" (p. 221). In the case of Japan, however, the distinctive nature of these beliefs and practices can be a source of both fascination and frustration for some Western observers. Undoubtedly, as Takemoto (1982) puts it, a large part of its distinctiveness can be traced to the nation's history. This is hardly surprising, since, a combination of factors, such as natural isolation, as well as an official policy dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries which strictly forbade interactions with the outside world, only served to widen the cultural gap and helped solidify a collectivist mindset (Takemoto, 1982).

In contrast, modern-day-Japan has opened its cultural and economic doors to the world, so much so, that Japan now stands out as a nation that has gone to great lengths to ensure that this and future generations are bilingual and bicultural (Noguchi, 1987). In fact, English has become so important that it is now studied more than any other foreign language in both public and private institutions throughout Japan (Tanaka & Tanaka, 1995).

However, due to an education system which, for the most part, placed a greater emphasis on developing learners' linguistic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical items) than on the ability to use language for communicative purposes (LaCastro, 1997; Miller, 1995; Morrow, 1987), it is difficult for many Japanese to carry out basic oral communicative tasks in English (Morrow, 1987). Such traditional methods, although effective in preparing students for university entrance exams, do little to develop learners' pragmatic competence: that is, their ability "to use language effectively in order to achieve a specific purpose and to understand language in context" (Thomas, 1983, p. 92). Indeed, as many linguists now concur (Kemp, 1997; Burt, 1991; Fukushima, 1990), pragmatics is vital to understanding language in context, and as such, to neglect it in the language classroom would mean to compromise the process of L2 acquisition.

Pragmatics

Essentially, pragmatics refers to the study of how we make meaning in social contexts through our knowledge of the real world. It accounts for speakers' intent, the way they use speech acts to convey intent, and the strategies interlocutors employ to interpret such intentions (Davis, 1991). Pragmatics is concerned with understanding intentional human speech acts and can provide us with insights into differences between Western and Japanese conversational norms. Thus, a greater understanding of the theory which underlies these processes can help us better understand how and why learners transfer pragmatic norms from L1 to L2, as well as a range of possible outcomes.

Pragmatic Transfer

Pragmatic transfer occurs when non-native speakers transfer norms and forms of speech act realization from their native language (L1) to the target language (TL) (Saito &

Beecken, 1997). Specifically, pragmatic transfer can either facilitate (positive transfer) the L2 acquisition process or, conversely, hinder (negative transfer/interference) it (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Odlin, 1989). While the former occurs when there are positive correlations between the L1 and TL, the latter occurs more commonly when the two languages do not share similar linguistic and/or cultural assumptions (Odlin, 1989). For example, in the case of JSE, negative transfer may account for certain (verbal and nonverbal) behavior which, to the Western eye, would appear to overemphasize psychological distance (i.e., differences in status and age) between members of dyads (Beebe et al., 1990).

Thus, dissimilarities in cultural norms and expectations can give rise to misunderstandings during interactions between JSE and NSE, what Thomas (1983) has termed "pragmatic failure." This may lead to other unintended and potentially negative outcomes.

Pragmatic Failure

Broadly speaking, pragmatic failure occurs when an utterance fails to accomplish the speaker's intention (Nelson et al., 1996). While recognizing that, potentially, behind any misunderstanding there could be any number of underlying causes, for the purpose of the following discussion this paper will address the two most salient varieties as discussed by Thomas (1983): pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure.

According to Thomas, pragmalinguistic failure is language-specific and occurs when a speaker fails to apply the same pragmatic force to an utterance that a native speaker would given the same circumstances, or when there is negative transfer of speech act strategies (i.e., politeness strategies) from the

L1 to the TL. For example, a literal translation of the Japanese *suru beki* is 'should do' and *suru hou ga ii* is 'had better do.' In English, 'should do' and 'had better do' are often used to give advice. Note that the pragmatic force of the latter is stronger than the former in that 'had better do' carries the implication that if the advice is not carried out there will be a negative consequence. Unlike their English counterparts, however, the pragmatic force behind *suru hou ga ii* is weaker than *suru beki*. In short, the way the two are used, compared with English, is reversed—pragmatically speaking, *suru beki* suggests stronger advice than *suru hou ga ii.* Therefore, an uninformed JSE wishing to express the pragmatic equivalent of *suru hou ga ii* (gentle advice) in English, may instead produce the opposite and stronger form 'you had better do.' My wife, who is a JSE, and I have experienced this not-so-pleasant reverse-effect first hand. Similarly, the Japanese equivalent for 'I'd appreciate' is *shitei-tadakeruto ureshiinodesuga*, however, if a Japanese speaker unwittingly translates this expression directly into English it becomes (literally) 'I'm glad.' Thus, in Fukushima's 1990 study, pragmalinguistic transfer appears to account for unsuccessful attempts by JSE to formulate polite requests, such as, "I'm glad if you lend me some money for me" (p. 322). As a result, JSE responses were judged to be either too informal or too direct, and thus rude for their given contexts, by NSE. These findings confirm the observation in Yoshida et al. (2000) that JSE are far less likely to produce very polite language in English in situations where NSE would normally be expected to do so.

Sociopragmatic failure, on the other hand, results from conflicting evaluations of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior and stems from differences in cultural

perceptions (Thomas, 1983). For example, because it is customary to place *san*, as in *Suzuki san* (out of respect) at the end of an addressee's (first or last) name, a Japanese speaker—in spite of a native English speaker's attempts to minimize social distance by asking to be addressed by first name—may insist on using 'Mr.' or 'Mrs./Ms.' Likewise, a Westerner's dependence on a more direct, low-context communication style, versus the more indirect, high-context approach by Japanese, in which much is implied and nonverbal cues, context, and saving of face are the key, can potentially trigger socio-pragmatic failure. With this overt disparity in communication styles, one might envisage a scenario in which a JSE's polite reluctance to say 'no' directly in an effort to maintain harmony or avoid confrontation, may instead be misinterpreted to mean 'yes' by a NSE unaccustomed to reading between the lines.

We can say that sociopragmatic failure has occurred when an agent, without intention, wrongly assesses socio-cultural norms in an L2 context; that is, (a) social distance, (b) relative power, rights and obligations, (c) what is considered an imposition, and (d) when a face-threatening act—an act that intrinsically threatens the (face) wants of another individual (Brown & Levinson, 1988)—is appropriate and when it is not (Thomas, 1983), because the values assigned to those norms are not consistent with those in the L1.

Thomas (1983) contends that errors arising from pragmalinguistic failure, unlike sociopragmatic failure, can be treated much like grammatical errors since they are essentially linguistic problems. Therefore, they are rather easy to overcome. Sociopragmatic failure, on the other hand, is a more delicate matter to address, since it occurs when there are fundamental differences between the speaker's and listener's expectations and assessments of the socio-cultural context (Thomas, 1983). This is because people interpret others' conventionalized forms according to their "own cultural grid" (Beal, 1990, p. 21). This helps to explain why a person's actions and system of beliefs can be so ingrained that it is often difficult for them to see the reason behind other people's behavior if it contrasts their own (Beal, 1990). This suggests that there is less likelihood of conflict between dyads who share common propositions that they regard as true of the world (Marlos, 1981).

Thus, to better understand why communication breakdowns can occur between JSE and NSE, we first need to look at what dissimilarities, if any, exist between what JSE and NSE regard as appropriate social behavior and the rules by which they engage in social interaction. Moreover, we need to examine how those differences might be misinterpreted.

Different Rules— A Cultural Perspective

For some Westerners, "Japanese social behaviors are still regarded as complex and inscrutable" (Liu et al., 1997, p. 80). This is not surprising since, traditionally, the two cultures show marked preferences toward social behavior based on different ideologies; that is, one (Japanese) is based on collectivism (e.g., "Interdependence Is Sweeter than Individuality" [Yamada, 1997, p. 20]) while the other (Western) is structured on individualism (e.g., "Independence Is Stronger than Dependence" [Yamada, 1997, p. 20]). In fact, so conspicuous is this distinction that Sakamoto and Naotsuka (1982) liken it (metaphorically) to two separate games. They compare NSE interactional behavior, for example, to a game of tennis or volleyball

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where no one waits for the other to hit the ball. Instead, whoever is closest to the ball is expected to jump in and hit it without waiting for the other. According to them, however, native Japanese play according to a different set of rules, which they compare to a game of bowling. In this analogy, there is little competition for the floor and interlocutors wait patiently (i.e., self-restraint) for others to finish their turn before contributing.

Generally speaking, Western cultures are described as individualistic; that is, individuals can assert their own interests even if, in doing so, they may be in opposition to those of their group (Littlewood, 2001). Thus, the orientation is structured toward 'I.' In the case of Japanese culture, however, the group model is the dominant social characteristic, meaning that Japanese society is based on collectivism, with its orientation clearly shifted toward 'we' (Maynard, 1997). Typically, people's identity, attitudes, and actions are largely determined by the group; that is, 'We' always comes before 'I' (Gudykunst & San Antonio, 1993). Interestingly, schools in Japan appear to cultivate characteristics that will not impose on others (i.e., respect, and avoidance of speech) which may account for Japanese students' reluctance to state their opinions for fear of disturbing class harmony (Sasaki, 1996). These underlying values and beliefs are reflected eloquently in the common Asian expressions *Speech is silver, but Silence is gold* and *The nail that stands out gets hit*. In stark contrast, the familiar Western expression *Squeaky wheels get the grease* represents a very different notion. Thus silence, like language, is meaningful and is perceived and evaluated differently across cultures. It follows that negative transfer of silence, just like speech acts from L1 to L2 contexts, can be a predicate for misunderstandings and negative stereotyping.

Silence

Unlike western conversation norms, silence in Japan (even long silence) "is anything but a breakdown" (Yamada, 1997, p. 77) and is in fact tolerated. Teachers who are unfamiliar with Japanese socio-cultural norms are less likely to identify non-verbal cues—behavior which stems from values that are fostered and even encouraged in Japanese culture, such as empathy, dependency, self-restraint, and harmony for the sake of the group—that a student may be displaying. Thus they are more likely to interpret moments of silence negatively. To take one example, Fiyouzat (2003), a Western language teacher, after having recently arrived in Japan, recalls his initial response to one of his English classes at a Japanese university:

"OK. Let's see. If you understand what I am saying raise your hand." Nothing but dead stares. "Do you understand?" Nothing. "Understand?" Not a singular thing. Dead silence." (p. 41)

In fact, desperate comments similar to these, or others like 'What a boring bunch' were ripe at an English conversation school where I once worked, particularly after teachers had completed their scheduled time in a "conversation room" where JSE could (in theory) participate in general conversation in a non-classroom setting. Without a textbook to fall back on, since the sole purpose of the sessions was to engage learners in real English conversation, some sessions would turn into little more than an hour long monologue by a disgruntle teacher unless some learners were hard-pressed to speak. Indeed, it even appeared that with certain learners the more the teacher pushed them to speak, the greater their resistance (i.e., silence). One very real danger from all

of this is that if we neglect to look below the surface, such experiences may lead to negative stereotyping of JSE as reflected in comments such as "What a boring bunch," "you obstinate THINGS" (Fiyouzat, 2003, p. 41), or "[they] don't have opinions, can't think on their own" (Anderson, 1993, p. 35). Equally worrying is that these same experiences may lead students to perceive their teachers as "being very insensitive and even rude" (Anderson, 1993, p. 35) leading them to form negative stereotypes as well. None of this is conducive to creating an effective language learning environment.

Taking a closer look at the socio-cultural norms which govern the interactional style of the Japanese, one finds that reserve, formality, and silence are qualities that are encouraged and fostered within the Japanese education system and in society as a whole (Barnlund, 1989). As one might expect, unlike Western attitudes toward education, classroom culture in Japan generally discourages students from talking and sees silence as a virtue (Miller, 1995; Sasaki, 1996). Indeed, Japanese students commonly participate in lectures respectfully without expressing disagreement since the teacher's role is primarily that of a "transmitter of knowledge to the silent, unquestioning student" (King, 2005). Unfortunately for JSE, silence is hardly perceived as appropriate behavior in Western contexts and does not conform to what Anstey (2003) calls the "rules of engagement" for effective discourse in an English as a second language (ESL) learning environment. In fact, to the average Western teacher, whose primary role is that of "facilitator" (King, 2005), "such passivity implies a negligent attitude toward learning" (Miller, 1995, p. 32), and as such, it is normal practice for teachers to encourage their students to talk; a strategy which native Japanese students and their families may find

baffling (McPake & Powney, 1998). Hence, by looking from a Western ESL classroom perspective, two potential implications stemming from a native Japanese student's use of silence come to light: such ingrained attitudes toward silence may (1) interfere with pedagogical goals, and (2) frustrate both the JSE and other Japanese observers.

These effects have been documented by numerous researchers (e.g., King, 2005; Krieger, 2005; Fiyouzat, 2003; Harumi, 1999). In Harumi's (1999) study particularly, NSE and native Japanese informants were asked to comment on a Japanese female university student's use of silence during a video-recorded English session in a conversation room. Her findings help to expose fundamental differences in attitude that Westerners (here British) and Japanese have toward silence and underscore the significance of conflicting interactional styles and underlying values of both cultures. When interviewed about the female student's use of silence during the class, the Japanese informants typically—and predictably, in accordance with the preceding analysis—responded: 1) "she doesn't want to stand out" (2) "she is waiting for the teacher's help" and (3) "she wants the teacher to understand that she doesn't understand even without saying it" (Harumi, 1999, p. 3). Equally predictable were the British informants' responses: (1) "she is rude because she doesn't answer" (2) "she finds it (teaching or topic) boring" and (3) "she appears lazy as she does not try to understand" (Harumi, 1999, p. 3) etc.

The Japanese informants' responses, then, seem to reflect the principles and underlying values associated with the concepts *omoiyari* 'empathy,' *amae* 'dependency,' *enryo* 'self-restraint' (i.e., 'reserve' for the good of the group), and *wa* 'harmony' and demonstrate the way they can influence perceptions.

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Equally revealing are the British informants' responses—reflecting a preference for individualism and independence. This shows how fundamentally different interactional styles, and a lack of awareness about others' cultural assumptions, can give rise to negative evaluations of others. This leads us to concur with Murata (1994) and Tannen (1985) that ignoring differences that exist between individual speakers' conversational styles can lead to these differences being perceived negatively as a speaker's personal traits from which far-reaching social implications can arise.

Pedagogical Implications

To suggest that JSE and their Western language teachers are "worlds apart" (Miller, 1995, p. 38) regarding their views about what constitutes appropriate behavior in the language classroom may be somewhat harsh. However, these differences do manifest themselves in very real outcomes in the real world and, as scholars and educators, we cannot afford to downplay their significance.

According to McPake and Powney (1998), for example, even though (expatriate) Japanese children living and studying in England were able to do well academically by behaving as they would in a typical Japanese learning environment (i.e., remaining silent, participating minimally, etc.), some were unsure about how to deal with the relaxed nature of their new learning environment and consequently appeared very isolated in terms of social relationships. The outcome of this dissonance was that over time, even though the children were able to achieve high proficiency levels in English, it was rare for them to contribute to classroom discussion, and some appeared "pathologically shy" (McPake & Powney, 1998, p. 173). Unfortunately for the Japanese students,

the findings suggest that it was their overly passive behavior that was the likely cause of unfavorable perceptions by their classmates and teachers. This view is supported by Sasaki (1996), who claims that negative class participation of the kind observed above can hinder and/or disrupt pedagogical objectives in ESL learning and should therefore be "minimized, if not eradicated" (p. 237).

Despite its obvious social and pedagogical implications, we have seen that teachers often fail to recognize and respond to pragmatic failure when it occurs, and instead tend to view such occurrences as rude behavior on the part of students (Thomas, 1983). One possible reason for this oversight may be that, unlike grammar, which is inherently a rule-based system, pragmatic competence "entails probable rather than categorical rules" (Candlin, 1976, p. 238). In other words, sociopragmatic decision making requires one to make value judgments based on one's own value/belief system. Accordingly, teachers may either simply be unaware of its significance in language learning, or may be wary of grappling with "a potentially explosive area" (Thomas, 1983, p. 109) of language that, by its very nature, is subjective and therefore potentially face-threatening.

Regardless of these challenges, pragmatic competence needs to be reinforced in the language instruction of Japanese ESL learners (Kemp, 1997; Burt, 1991; Fukushima, 1990). Therefore, we must not only focus our learners on the linguistic elements of the TL, but we must also show them "what beliefs and values are assigned importance by the local culture" (Kemp, 1997, p. 274). This in itself can be problematic for both learners and teachers. To begin with, the term 'communicative' is a culturally-laden reality since, as we have seen, what constitutes appropriate communicative behavior can vary across cul-

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tures (Miller, 1995). It is therefore essential that teachers are careful to avoid rigidly applying "standards that stem from their (own) ethno-centric perspective" (Miller, 1995, p. 32). Only by taking a more ethno-relativist approach can teachers be in a better position to recognize that what an untrained observer might view as a student's unwillingness to respond may instead be intended as an act of respect (Miller, 1995), in which the student resists taking up the teacher's time or avoids a situation in which the teacher may lose face (King, 2005). This is particularly important considering the overt power imbalance (age & status) that exists between native Japanese students and their teachers.

Indeed, because Japanese culture places great value on social hierarchy, teachers are generally highly regarded. Thus, the teacher is often honored as "the unquestioned embodiment of power and authority" (Nakamura, 1997). There is also a strong tendency for Japanese students to rely unquestionably on a teacher's knowledge. While keeping this in mind, and the fact the ability to think independently is not particularly prized in Japanese schools (McPake & Powney, 1998) and that Japanese students are expected to listen to teachers without expressing disagreement (Miller, 1995), Western teachers need to be aware that their students may expect little or no negotiation of meaning with either teachers or classmates (Korst, 1997).

A broader cultural understanding can help to instill greater tolerance, and with it "more realistic expectations regarding the classroom expectations of their students" (Miller, 1995, p. 32). Empathy, therefore, plays a crucial role in the language teachers' professional development—and a vital role in the development of students' communicative competence.

According to Kemp (1997), in their pursuit of cultural enlightenment, foreign language teachers may acquire what he has termed 'involuntary empathy' unknowingly through a process of stock taking, self-interrogation and negotiations with "informed colleagues" (p. 272). Conversely, 'emergent empathy' can occur through conscious attempts by the teacher to get to know the students' culture as well as the students themselves. Kemp describes this developmental process as ongoing. He adds that teachers can achieve this either through reading, studying, or being directly involved with the Japanese people first hand. Through this process, it is hoped that teachers can develop a better awareness of aspects from their own cultures that JSE might interpret as "ethnocentric or objectionable" (Kemp, 1997, p. 274). To achieve this, teachers need to familiarize themselves with the beliefs and values that Japanese people hold dear: that is, "seniority, politeness, communal responsibility and sensitivity to face, inner versus outer worlds, modesty and abandonment of individual self for a more collective identification" (Kemp, 1997, p. 274). Developing such awareness would lessen the likelihood of JSE evaluating Westerners as arrogant or uncultured (Kemp, 1997), and would therefore aid in establishing a platform from which mutual understanding and positive outcomes can grow.

This was demonstrated by Miller (1995) who surveyed Japanese university ESL students and found that what they wanted was for their Western teachers to be culturally sensitive and aware of their communicative style (i.e., Japanese students are reserved, modest, and silent even when they have something to say, etc.). The study also found that, when the Western language teacher was empathetic to this need, it led to more positive outcomes in students' behavior and general attitude toward participating in com-

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municative based lessons.

Thus, for all of the reasons above, it is important to stress that the role of language teachers is not to "enforce Anglo-Saxon standards of behavior, linguistic or otherwise" (Thomas, 1983, p. 96). Instead, the primary concern of teachers should be to empower their learners with knowledge that will ensure that, at the very least, they are aware of fundamental differences (linguistic and cultural) between the L1 and the TL. With such knowledge, our students will be better equipped to make more informed decisions when trying to avert misunderstandings.

Social Implications

Thus far, we have seen that more often than not, misunderstandings can and do occur when interlocutors fail to comprehend why something was said, or not said, rather than what was said. In large part, this is because pragmatic failure often passes unnoticed by untrained observers, such as unsuspecting teachers, students, and dyads outside the classroom (Thomas, 1983). And very often, interlocutors "are unaware that there has been a faulty message transmission and/or reception" (Varonis & Gass, 1985, p. 331). Hence, unlike grammatical errors, which show a speaker to be less competent with the structural elements of an L2, pragmatic failure can often reflect badly on the character of the speaker himself (Fitzgerald, 2003; Thomas, 1983). For example, he may be perceived as rude. Consequently, NSE are far more likely to associate such apparent impoliteness with "boorishness or ill-will" (Thomas, 1983, p. 97). This can lead to serious consequences when 'gatekeepers' do not share the same communicative style as the non-native speaker (Fitzgerald, 2003).

How and when a misunderstanding occurs depends, in part, on the extent to which interlocutors are able to transform their assumptions about the physical and social world which, in turn, is limited by their own egocentric tendencies as well as their ability to empathize with others (Langness & Frank, 1981). Hence, the less people know about each other on linguistic, social and cultural levels, the greater the potential for misunderstandings.

It is important to remember that learning a second language also occurs in a social setting and, therefore, learning outcomes depend as much on affective considerations and social interactions within the classroom as they do on course content. As gatekeepers, educators are responsible for giving learners adequate exposure to both the linguistic and cultural elements of the target language, while at the same time ensuring that they are cross-culturally savvy themselves. These are pedagogical objectives that language teachers in present-day Japan cannot afford to overlook. To do so, in my opinion, would be tantamount to expecting novice drivers, instructed only in the technical aspects of driving a car (i.e., changing gears, parking, reversing, etc.) but knowing nothing about the road rules to suddenly be able to make their way safely through rush hour traffic. As absurd as this expectation would be, the reality is that teachers, because of curriculum and time constraints, are sometimes forced to limit their teaching to only the technical aspects—grammar, structure, pronunciation, fluency, etc.—of the target language, with little or no chance to expose students to the submerged, less obvious aspects of the cultural iceberg that they desperately need.

Conclusion

Although some of the challenges facing Western language teachers and JSE may seem, on the surface, insurmountable, this

paper has provided at least some steps toward developing a greater awareness of, and hopefully a framework for overcoming some of the challenges they face. In the end, I concur with King (2005), that it is a combination of empathy and a greater awareness of cross-cultural differences that can help to minimize misunderstandings, which in turn can translate into more positive social and pedagogical outcomes for educators and learners alike. Only by familiarizing ourselves and our learners with both the visible and hidden parts of the cultural iceberg can we help our students become not only bilingual, but also bicultural.

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Validity of Center Examinations for Assessment of Communicative Ability

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2003年、文部科学省は英語によるコミュニケーション能力向上を目的とした活動計画に於いて、高校、大学入学試験（英語）が及ぼす指導方法、学習意欲等への影響を指摘し、試験の改善を提案している。本稿はセンター試験（英語）がコミュニケーション能力を測定するという点に於いて、どの程度適しているかを調べた。Bachmanが定義するコミュニケーション能力を構成する要素を基に、試験の各セクションを分析し、試験全体としてのコミュニケーション能力テストとしての妥当性について考察した。その結果、主に知識としての英語能力の測定に適し、その運用能力を測定する上では大幅な改善が必要と考える。

Introduction

Mombukagaku-sho announced in 2003 its guidelines for developing English communicative ability in Japanese or *Eigo ga tsukaeru nihonjin no ikusei*. The guidelines contained several proposed actions that could lead to this end, including the suggestion that entrance examinations for college and high school (2005) be revised to properly assess the communicative ability that students should have acquired through English education at school. The guidelines also address the significant effects of the entrance examinations on teaching, students' motivation, and students' attitudes toward learning English.

The effect of tests on teaching and learning, called "washback," has been widely studied. Weir (1990) points out the positive washback effect of testing on communicative language teaching. Gates (1995) writes, "The closer a language test meets the final language needs of the students, the stronger the washback will be" (p. 102) and refers to direct tests as having strong positive washback on students' motivation. On the other hand, the negative washback of current entrance examinations has been pointed out (e.g., Brown & Yamashita, 1995a, 1995b; Tsukada, 1991). Brown and Yamashita conclude that developing *test-wiseness* in students and discrete-point and receptive skill-centered language teaching might be the result of current university entrance examinations. They also write: "Students who are preparing for examinations of one type or the other, may quite reasonably want to focus on discrete grammar points, or translation tasks, and have very little interest in the communicative language learning or task-based learning" (1995b, p. 98). This tendency might be changed if the discrepancy between course and test objectives is reduced as Gates (1995) suggests. Therefore, there is a need to develop a test on the basis of a clear definition of what it intends to measure, and how it intends to do so.

Brown and Yamashita (1995b) analyzed the entrance examinations of ten private and ten public universities, as well as the center examination in terms of the test length, passage difficulty, types of items and types of skills measured by these examinations. The

center examination is a standardized norm-referenced test administered nationwide as a preliminary test before the examination given by individual public universities. Ten years later, Kikuchi (2006) conducted a follow-up study on the examinations of the same universities studied by Brown and Yamashita and the center examination. However, all the examinations studied, except the center examination, were from the English or English literature departments of those universities. It can be inferred that the examinees of these tests were more motivated and had more positive attitudes toward learning English than those who planned to major in subjects other than English or English literature. Therefore, when investigating the washback effect of entrance examinations on teaching and learning, the center examination provides the most reliable measure, as it is administered nationwide at public universities, regardless of the departments the examinees plan to enter. Moreover, an increasing number of private universities are replacing their own tests with the center examination.

In this paper, I will investigate the validity of the center examination as a measure of what Mombukagaku-sho intends to develop in students during the six years of English education at school. In other words, does the center examination adequately measure English communicative ability?

Method

Materials

Three center examinations administered in 2003, 2004, and 2005—the latest materials available at the time this study was conducted—were analyzed. As these three examinations were administered before and after the announcement of *Mombukagaku-*

sho's guidelines, it was presumed that there might have been changes in the design of the center examination during this period.

These three examinations are identical in organization, length, and number of questions in each section, which suggests that the same abilities are being measured in the same way in all the three examinations. Each examination consists of six sections (i.e., six types of tasks). All items are multiple-choice type.

Analysis

The three center examinations were analyzed in terms of Bachman's (1990) communicative language ability. The abilities and skills that each section of the center examination measures and the item type of each section were analyzed to answer the following questions:

1. What ability does each section of the center examination measure?
2. What is the language theory that underlies the center examination? How does the theory influence its design?
3. What are the features of a communicative language test? To what extent does the center examination have these features?

Results

1. What ability does each section of the center examination measure?

Section 1

Section 1 consists of Part A and B. Part A asks the examinee the location of stress, or where to put the stress in the pronunciation of a particular word. Thus, the task is intended to assess the examinee's knowledge of phonology and graphonology, compo-

nents of what Bachman (1990) defines as grammatical competence. In some cases, the examinee must identify the part of speech as well. Even though the word in question is presented as a constituent of a sentence, the answer requires only knowledge of phonology at the segmental level, as shown in the following example. The examinee chooses the pair of underlined words that notes the correct pronunciation:

Q 2. I was (a)<u>embarrassed</u> when my joke was taken as an (b)<u>insult</u>.
① (a) émbarrassed   (b) insúlt
② (a) émbarrassed   (b) ínsult
③ (a) embárrassed   (b) insúlt
④ (a) embárrassed   (b) ínsult
(Nyuushi sentaashiken, 2005)

In Part B, the examinee identifies the primary stress of a speaker's utterance in a conversation. The knowledge of phonology at the suprasegemental level is assessed—that is, whether the student knows how suprasegmentals are used to focus information or express emotions. However, as the utterances in question are taken from conversational discourse, examinees must also draw upon grammatical competence and knowledge of rhetorical organization, which Bachman puts under the heading of textual competence. In this case, suprasegmentals of phonology work as the means by which speakers control the discourse by intoning their utterances to emphasize a particular word. In the following example, from the same test cited above, the examinee chooses the word stressed most in each underlined part:

Maya: Here comes our train. It's not too crowded.
Jeff: Do the trains (1)<u>get any worse than this</u>?

Maya: Oh, yes. During the morning rush hour (2)<u>they're twice as bad</u>.
Jeff: I can't imagine a train being more crowded than this. Where I'm from, (3)<u>we can always get a seat</u>.
Maya: You were lucky, but you'll have to get used to the crowds here. How do you get to school? Do you take a train?
Jeff: No. (4)<u>I walk to school</u>.
Q 1. ① get ② any ③ worse ④ than
Q 2. ① they're ② twice ③ as ④ bad
Q.3. ① we ② can ③ always ④ get
Q 4. ① I ② walk ③ to ④ school
(Nyuushi sentaashiken, 2005)

The most significant difference between Part B and Part A is that the task in Part B is more contextualized than the one in Part A. Therefore, it can be said that Part B measures the examinee's knowledge of language use in communication more than Part A.

Section 2

Section 2 consists of Parts A, B and C. Part A is a discrete-point task requiring the examinee to fill in the blank with a word or phrase chosen from four options. The word or phrase in question should be selected based on its meaning, grammatical form or the idiom of which the selected word or phrase is a part, as in the example below:

Q1. Thank you, Hiromi. This book is exactly [⎯⎯⎯] I wanted.
① what ② which ③ of which ④ that
Q 2. We have to find the [⎯⎯⎯] to the world's environmental problem.
① results ② causes ③ solutions ④ benefits
Q 3. The mechanics said that it would cost [⎯⎯⎯] 700 dollars to fix my car.
① on me ② me ③ to me ④ for me
(Nyuushi sentaashiken, 2005)

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As the tested word or phrase is presented in a sentence, the examinee must select the correct answer in context. However, the multiple-choice format does not allow interaction with the text; rather, as Bachman points out, "the input material in the stems and choices serves solely as a medium for focusing the test taker's attention on the grammatical form" (1990, p. 141). The examinee must rely solely on knowledge of syntax or vocabulary, which might have been learned devoid of context, independent of any real use of English. For Q 2. in the example above, the correct choice, ③, can be selected by knowing the combination of a noun and a preposition (i.e., ① results / of, ② causes / of, ③ solutions / to, ④ benefits / of). For this reason, the examinee may assume that English tested by this task is one thing and English in real communication is another. An examinee may also think that it is necessary to learn English differently depending on whether it is for real use in communication or for entrance examinations. Therefore, it is likely that when applying knowledge to a real-life situation, learners may be confused by these apparently different types of English—and this may drive them to silence out of fear of making mistakes. In this regard, Oller (1990) says that discrete-point testing reflects teaching methods that center around de-contextualized, meaningless pattern drills. He distinguishes pattern drills according to whether a drill is based on meaning specific to a particular context or not. The task in Part A is more likely to result from the drills that are not contextualized.

Compared with Part A, Part B of Section 2 is more contextualized. The examinee selects an utterance from options to complete a short conversational discourse between two people. As the context is given in conversational discourse, the examinee needs to interact with the text as one of the speakers in the conversation. So, the ability required in this task seems to be more authentic than that required in Part A. The examinee needs to understand the natural sequence of conversation and how the conversation develops. He or she has to know natural expressions or lexical items to make the discourse coherent and natural. Bachman (1990) defines this ability as "textual competence"(pp. 88-89). In this task, however, the exchange is too short (usually three to four turns) to measure communicative competence properly. Speakers need to follow conversational conventions, such as topic nomination, topic development or attention getting and so forth in order to organize spoken discourse and engage in appropriate turn taking as a co-constructor of discourse. Therefore, the exchange should be long enough to measure not only textual competence but also the conversational conventions described above. The same holds true with the following example from Part C:

Q2. Does having pictures on a menu ___ [22] ___ [23] ___ to order?
① to decide ② what ③ make ④ easier ⑤ it

Q3. All the students ___ [24] ___ [25] ___ next week's meeting.
① studying abroad ② interested in ③ attend ④ should ⑤ who are

(Nyuushi sentaashiken, 2005)

These questions test how to order words in a sentence on the basis of formulaic knowledge of a particular phrase or grammatical usage of English. The examinee has to mark the options on the answer sheet only for the second and fourth part of the phrase in question, but not for the whole sentence or phrase. Options are not provided in the

same form consistently. They take the form of a word or phrase even in a question. This may cause some confusion in marking, which may effect the reliability of the task. It is uncertain whether wrong answers result from the examinee's lack of knowledge or just careless mistakes made in the process of marking the answer sheet. For instance, in Q3 above, an examinee who can make the correct sentence might easily make a mistake break up the clause incorrectly (i.e., *who are interested in studying abroad should attend next week's meeting*) and mark the answer sheet incorrectly. As a result, one might mark option ② for blank 24 and option ① for blank 25 instead of option ③.

Section 3

In Section 3, the tasks are given at the discourse level to measure textual competence. The examinee makes a passage coherent and cohesive by putting jumbled sentences in the correct order, inserting a sentence chosen from a list in the proper place in the passage, or selecting the adverb or adverbial phrase appropriate for each blank in the passage. In these tasks, the examinee comprehends the meaning of the text, identifies the relation between pronouns and their antecedents, and recognizes the organization of a whole passage. The example below requires the examinee to put the sentences A, B and C in the correct order in the missing part of the passage:

Q1. Did you know that things as small as leaves can delay trains? When leaves fall onto the tracks, they can cause wheels to slip and then the brakes may not work properly. ☐ They claim that it could blast leaves away easily and quickly.

A. Some scientists suggest that a laser device fitted onto the front of a train

might solve the problem.

B. In spite of such efforts, trains are sometimes delayed for long periods of time.

C. In some areas, those leaves have to be removed by an army of cleaners.

① A-B-C ② A-C-B ③ B-A-C
④ B-C-A ⑤ C-A-B ⑥ C-A-B
(Nyuushi sentaashiken, 2005)

From Section 1 through Section 3, we can observe that most questions deal with only a particular linguistic element independently. For instance, the question in Part A of Section 1 tests knowledge of the stress of two words in a sentence but does not ask the examinee how the words are pronounced when the sentence is used in discourse. Furthermore, it seems that the questions measure knowledge of linguistic elements progressively, from a lower level to a higher level for each linguistic category (i.e., from a segmental level to a suprasegmental level for phonology in Section 1; from word level to sentence level for structure in Section 2; from phrase level to sentence level to passage level for coherence and cohesion in Section 3). Therefore, it can be inferred that the test designers regard language as a kind of system consisting of independent elements with several hierarchical levels.

The other three sections (Sections 4 through 6) test reading comprehension. Each section is composed of a relatively long text, from one and a half to two pages (about 400 to 600 words), followed by five to seven questions. However, each reading comprehension section is different in terms of text type, genre, mode of discourse, or interactiveness. Interactiveness means that the task requires that the examinees process information from more than one source in order to complete the task. (i.e., combining

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text, graphs, and/or photos). As a result, the level of transparency of the text is also different for these three sections.

Sections 4 & 5

The text in Section 4 is an article about some aspect of the Japanese economy or industry; Section 5 is a conversation between two or three people talking about topics related to school life. Examinees need to adjust their reading so that the text of each section is understood appropriately according to its text type, topic, and mode of discourse. Hence, these two sections appear to measure sociolinguistic competence pertaining to pragmatic competence. In these sections, examinees read graphs or identify pictures provided with the text on the basis of the information from the text and attempt to interpret it appropriately. This requires that examinees use both linguistic skills and other kinds of cognitive skills—which is what the examinee is likely to do when reading materials in English in college. Bachman (1990) refers to this kind of interactiveness as an essential feature necessary to make a test authentic (p. 317). In this sense, Section 4 and 5 can be considered relatively authentic.

Section 6

Section 6 contains a narrative based on the personal experience of a person about the same age (typically 17 or 18) as most examinees, requiring them to interpret the text more subjectively. But the section employs a multiple choice format which forces examinees to select an option from a list. This may undermine authenticity, which the task might have reflected had examinees the opportunity to answer in their own words (as in a short answer or a short essay format). Furthermore, it is likely that the questions in Section 6 can be answered solely by trans-

lating the text literally. Thus, Section 6 may be regarded as measuring translation skill rather than reading comprehension. Brown and Yamashita (1998b) pointed this out about the reading section of the college entrance examinations they researched (p. 98).

2. What is the language theory that underlies the center examination? How does the theory influence the design of the center examination?

We can infer from the features revealed in the analysis above the language theory underlying the center examination.

First, the abilities measured by the three tests are quite limited and classified under what Bachman (1990) terms "language competence" (p. 84). This includes grammatical and pragmatic competence. The main focus is placed on whether the examinee has specific knowledge of linguistic elements. The other two competencies in Bachman's framework of communicative ability, strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms, appear to be totally ignored—even though these two competencies must be employed for execution of linguistic knowledge in real-life conversations. Therefore, the center examination can be seen as primarily measuring "usage" of English, but not its "use" (Widdowson, 1978, p. 3). It is designed based on a theory that regards language as a system comprising linguistic elements and operating according to rules.

Second, the discrete-point testing type that pedominates the center examination suggests a heavy emphasis on English usage. Most of the questions are discrete-point type with a multiple-choice format concerning a particular linguistic element or rule. Even in the reading sections, the multiple-choice format makes the questions discrete-point rather than integrative. They can only be

answered through knowledge of vocabulary or cohesive devices, such as paraphrasing or identifying pronouns and antecedents. This may be largely attributed to "the nature of the alternatives offered to the examinee on each item" (Oller, 1979, p. 233). As Oller suggests, multiple-choice format questions can be revised to measure reading ability in a more authentic way, by asking examinees the main topic of the passage or the ideas that they infer from the text. But no question in the center examination asks for this kind of information.

Third, as observed in other studies on college entrance examinations (Brown & Yamashita, 1995b; Kikuchi, 2004), all the skills measured are receptive, not productive. It may be no exaggeration to say that all tasks can be managed by using reading skills alone. Even though a listening section was introduced in the center examination this year, no significant changes toward the testing of productive skills has been seen.

The tendency to focus on receptive skills arises from test methods and item types that are not specific to the ability or skill that each section intends to measure. Bachman (1990) emphasizes the relationship between the method types, item types, and the kinds of abilities measured. He holds that different communicative language abilities are required in order to do different types of test tasks, saying "it is not surprising to find that aspects of the test method, which provide much of the context of language tests, affect performance on language tests" (1990, p. 113). Furthermore, he refers to the different effects caused by the same method on different examinees and asserts that this variability can be attributed to one of the components of communicative language ability, strategic competence. In this sense, strategic competence is measured indirectly—simultane-ously with other types of competence—by varying test methods and item types. The discrete-point testing and multiple-choice answering format of the center examination seems less likely to assess strategic competence and related competence effectively. On the contrary, they are more likely to develop *testwiseness,* as students practice for a particular test by familiarizing themselves with the features of the center examination. They may attend solely to the linguistic elements and contexts provided by the text.

This observation supports the claim that the center examination is based on the idea that language is a system consisting of linguistic elements governed by rules. This kind of view and discrete-point testing are often claimed to be the main causes of negative washback in teaching and testing practice (Oller, 1979). Domination of the grammar-translation method in the classroom is thought to be obvious evidence of this effect. Thus, it is apparent that there is a distinct contradiction between what the center examination intends to measure and what the *Mombukagaku-sho* aims to develop in students. If a test is used as an incentive to enhance communication-centered English education, it should be designed on the basis of current communicative language theories. From the perspective of current communicative language theories, language should be learned not as a linguistic system consisting of syntactic rules and vocabulary, but as one of the components necessary for communication that works together with other extra-linguistic components, or pragmatics, to make and interpret the meaning appropriately in particular situations. Therefore, not only language teaching but also language testing should be based on language use, not on language usage.

It is often pointed out that the correspond-

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ence between language learning goals, content of language teaching, and assessment is essential. Kasper and Rose (2001) write, "Especially in instructional contexts where formal testing is regularly performed, curricular innovations that comprise pragmatics as a learning objective will be ineffective as long as pragmatic ability is not included as a regular and important component of language tests" (p. 9). Childs (2004) ascribes the persistent reliance of teaching vocabulary and syntactic rules at school in Japan to practical reasons, such as large class size or the heavy schedule of teachers, and an economical system that benefits from a "comfortable old definition of language" (p. 14), as do publishing companies and cram schools. In this regard, the center examination plays a crucial role, for it motivates what is taught and practiced in this system. If we expect positive washback in teaching, the center examination should be revised based on current language theories and designed to measure language use rather than language knowledge. As a result, positive washback would lead to curriculum innovation placing pragmatics in the center of course design and language testing as Childs proposes (2004, p. 22).

3. What are the features of a communicative language test? To what extent does the center examination have these features?

In Bachman's view, the authenticity of language tests, the essential feature of language tests based on current language theories, is achieved by two approaches: the *interactional/ability* (IA) approach and the *real/life performance* (RL) approach (1990). The IA approach takes the language ability of the language user as the primary source of authenticity, and defines the authenticity of a test task as "its potential for generating an authentic interaction with the abilities of a given group of test takers" (p. 317). Bachman holds that language tests should be designed to maximize the interaction between the examinee's abilities, test tasks, and the testing context, and refers to TOEFL as one of the typical examples of this approach. This approach appears to correspond to Oller's pragmatic naturalness criteria (1979, p. 33), which stress the interaction between the examinee's abilities to process language and context, both linguistic and extra-linguistic. *Pragmatic tests* (or integrative tests) based on these criteria include dictation, cloze tests, and variations of the two. Bachman differentiates interactiveness from authenticity later, but still maintains that interactiveness is essential for language tests as an indication of construct validity (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 24).

The RL approach emphasize the context or situation where actual communication occurs. Taking this approach, Weir (1990) strongly advocates direct tests (or performance tests). Direct tests require the examinee to actually perform in a particular context that should be as representative as possible of his or her real use of language, in order to assess integrated performance under "realistic linguistic, situational, cultural and affective constraints" (Weir, 1990, p. 12). He argues against Oller's pragmatic tests in that they lack "the productive and receptive processing of discourse" (1990, p. 5) under these constraints. Weir further criticizes "integrative tests" (a term Oller uses interchangeably with pragmatic tests) for assessing only linguistic competence and still being usage-based. He points out that they may induce negative washback if students are taught how to succeed in indirect tasks other than authentic use of language. Even though he acknowledges the weak validity

of direct tests and the low generalizability of test data for inference of the examinee's overall proficiency, he stresses the potential of direct tests to enhance beneficial pedagogical effects at school (1990). To this end, however, it is necessary to analyze the discourse the examinees need to learn and specify the purpose of testing. The results of these processes should be the basis for designing a direct test.

It seems that direct tests, or the RL approach to authenticity, have now gained a perceived value greater than integrated (pragmatic) tests or the IA approach partly due to their washback in teaching and partly for theoretical reasons. This trend toward including the examinee's actual language use in tests can be seen in the recent revision of TOEFL. Educational Testing Service (ETS) announced the new TOEFL in late 2005. It includes "more constructed-response or performance tasks (including speaking) that require the integration of more than one language skill (e.g., writing or speaking in response to listening and reading materials)" (Enright, 2004, p. 147).

In terms of authenticity, whether it is defined based on the RL or AI approach, it can hardly be said that the current center examination measures communicative ability appropriately. It does not ask the examinee to perform in a real communication situation, nor does it require interaction between the examinee and the text in authentic ways because of its discrete-point questions and multiple-choice format described above.

Conclusion

Using the center examination for assessing communicative ability in English is far from rational from the perspective of current communicative language theories, although its construct validity might be high enough to

measure language ability from the perspective that takes the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar as essential or even sufficient. Thus, a mismatch arises between the language theories that underlie communicative language teaching and the one on which the center examination is based, and the negative washback of the center examination might be attributable to this mismatch. The primary reason for this mismatch can be found in the ambiguity of the purpose of the center examination. In other words, what the center examination is intended to measure is not clear.

If we intend to exploit the entrance examination to facilitate communicative language teaching and make it appropriate to assess students' communicative ability acquired at school, the center examination must be designed to measure communicative ability. The new TOEFL may provide a good example in this regard, and using it as a possible alternative to entrance examinations would satisfy the change in testing practice suggested by *Mombukagaku-sho*. It is also recommended that performance tests be included as at least part of the entrance examination. However, the extent to which the examinee's actual language use should be included in the examination and how it should be performed and measured must be addressed in depth. These issues, as well as the purpose of the center examination, should be dealt with on the basis of needs analyses of all parties concerned, including universities, high schools, *Mombukagaku-sho*, as well as the examinees themselves. In addition, technical concerns such the feasibility or economics of concurrently administering performance tests nationwide have yet to be discussed fully.

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SLA Beginnings: The Significance of Corder's 1967 Article

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Introduction

The year 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of one of the most important articles written on the subject of second language learning; one which has been hugely influential in applied linguistics, language teaching, and in particular, second language acquisition (SLA).

Despite the fact that language learning and teaching has for so long been a part of the human experience, the field of SLA and the body of research it incorporates is a surprisingly recent development. As an area of academic study, it is a relative newcomer. While existing for a little over three decades, SLA has expanded and diversified dramatically, and become a research area encompassing a number of applied, theoretical, and experimental approaches (Sorace, 2000). Looking back to the beginnings of this discipline in the late 1960s and its establishment in the 1970s, one particular name and article stands out: S. Pit Corder and his "The significance of learners' errors," published in 1967 in the *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. This article was partially stimulated by research being done at the time with immigrant children in Glasgow, Scotland (Howatt, 1997). The adjective "seminal" is often applied to this groundbreaking, influential work. This essay will review six major insights presented in Corder's article: (1) the impact of L1 on second language learning, (2) the input and intake distinction, (3) the built-in syllabus concept and transitional competence, (4) the error/mistake distinction, (5) a systematic view of errors, and (6) reasons for the significance of learner errors.

Professor Stephen Pit Corder (1919-1990), former head of the Department of Applied Linguistics in Edinburgh University, published a series of influential articles in the late sixties and early seventies which have since been viewed as pioneering papers in SLA. The American linguist, Larry Selinker, who studied with Corder in Edinburgh and was very much influenced by his work, sums up how Professor Corder is viewed: "It is generally and genuinely acknowledged that . . . SLA studies could not have come about without the pioneering, theoretical and speculative work of S. Pit Corder" (Selinker, 1992, p. 144).

While there is much in the impressive body of work produced by Corder that is of interest, the 1967 article is widely recognized as the starting point of second language acquisition as an independent field of inquiry (Sorace, 2000). Before looking at the numerous insights contained in "The significance of learners' errors," it is appropriate to frame this discussion by sketching the then current thinking about language learning and teaching that was dominant in the late sixties when Corder's paper was first published.

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Background

Corder's 1967 paper makes reference to the widespread hypothesis of behaviorism, and in a later work (Corder, 1981) he tells us that the prevailing SLA theory in the late 1960s was behavioristic, holding the view that language learning was primarily a question of acquiring a new set of language habits. The habits of a learner's native language were believed to be transferred, and were regarded as an element "interfering with" the newly acquired habits of the L2 (Benson, 2002). Subsequently, learning a second language was seen as a process of overcoming native language habits to acquire the new habits of the target language. With respect to learner errors, they were viewed as "bad habits" and perceived to be damaging to successful language learning because they impeded the development of correct language learning habits (Ellis, 1994). In dealing with learner errors, the preferred strategy of the audiolingual approach, which was heavily influenced by behavioristic thinking, was error prevention through a process of over-learning. Drills providing intensive practice, fundamental to this approach, supported the concept of practice makes perfect. Perfect meant error free, or at least kept to a minimum (James, 1998).

Such beliefs about L2 learning became widespread in the 1950s and 60s, but by the end of that last decade such behavioristic views began to be seriously questioned. Corder's 1967 paper helped speed the demise of such approaches, and presented a number of insights that caused a paradigm shift in how second language learning and learner errors were seen. It also proved to be the impetus for the establishment of SLA as a recognized discipline in its own right. Six influential views in particular were presented in this pioneering paper.

Corder's Insights

The Impact of L1 on Second Language Learning

As mentioned, during the period surrounding the publication of Corder's paper, behaviorist theories contended that the main impediment to L2 learning was interference from the L1. In the 1950s and 60s the widely held belief was that a student's mother tongue played a decisive and negative role in acquiring an L2 (Larson-Freeman & Long, 1991). Contrary to these views, in his 1967 paper Corder writes, "...the position taken here is that the learner's possession of his native language is facilitative..." (p. 27). This "important notion" contends that it is a serious mistake to view the native language as simply negative and interfering (Selinker, 1992, p. 157). Instead, researchers should look for parallels between L1 acquisition and L2 learning as both are governed by similar underlying mechanisms, procedures, and strategies (James, 1998). In contrast to the current thinking at the time, Corder took an optimistic view of the role of the native language's impact on L2 learning. As a result, much subsequent research has been devoted to determining the nature and extent of this relationship.

The Input and Intake Distinction

Corder was the first to make an important distinction between these two terms. The difference he expressed was that input is simply what the learner is presented with, while intake is what the learner is actually ready to process, what is actually internalized ("taken in"). Selinker (1992) writes of the continued relevance of this distinction, and a major and on-going issue for SLA researchers has become the determination of

how parts of input are converted into intake (Johnson, 1998). For language teachers in the classroom, the input/intake distinction is also highly relevant: "Corder's paper raises a question crucial to an understanding of language teaching: What is the relationship between what we teach and what is learned" (Richards, 1974, p. 2).

The Built-In Syllabus Concept & Transitional Competence

These connected notions of built-in syllabus and transitional competence may have been the most important insights in this formative paper. They gave rise to what has become known as the concept of interlanguage, which provided SLA research with an identifiable field of study that belongs to no other academic field (Cook, 1993). According to the interlanguage hypothesis, L2 learners have an in-built syllabus; they construct a mental grammar different from both L1 and L2 which can be studied not only in comparison with the grammar of the target language, but in its own right (Sorace, 2000).

Corder's argument was the first to propose that the L2 learner may well possess an internally programmed sequence for learning various aspects of the target grammar. He additionally ventured that this sequence may or may not match with the syllabus imposed on the learner from the outside by the teacher. The term "transitional competence" to describe a learner's current mental rule system is derived from Chomsky's notion of competence. It stresses that the learner is in possession of a certain body of knowledge which underlies the language he produces and which may, or may not, be constantly developing (Corder, 1981).

A number of terms were later coined to describe this inherently programmed sequence, the best known of these being "interlanguage" (Selinker, 1972). As mentioned, Selinker studied with Corder in Edinburgh. Selinker (1992) refers to him as "my intellectual father in interlanguage and second language acquisition," and goes on to explicitly state that without Corder's intellectual input, "there would be no interlanguage hypothesis. It is as simple as that" (p. xi).

The interlanguage hypothesis, firmly grounded because of Corder's insights, was responsible for a whole new era of L2 teaching and research (Brown, 1994). Selinker (1992) reported that because of Corder's seminal paper there have been literally hundreds of empirical studies about interlanguage. More recently, Lightbrown (2000, p. 441) reports:

This generalization [that the learner creates a systematic interlanguage] is at the heart of modern SLA research. Corder (1967) suggested that learners' errors provided insight into the system underlying second language learners language use and in the years since that time, innumerable studies have confirmed that learners develop an "interlanguage" which has systematic properties that are not explained in any simple way by the input learners have been exposed to.

Corder's 1967 speculations about a built-in syllabus and on its dynamic, developmental nature (transitional competence) have proven very perceptive and far-reaching indeed. According to Ellis (1997, p. 24), one of the most important research findings of SLA is "the discovery of common patterns in the way in which learner language changes over time." The idea of development sequences, systematic and reliable stages of language acquisition (Lightbrown and Spada 2003), is a key element in the concept of a learner's interlanguage. The development of this concept is firmly rooted in Corder's insights into

the built-in syllabus and transitional competence first presented in the 1967 paper. Hadad (1998, p. 55) noted that "Corder's work (1967) sets the tone—that second language acquisition should be viewed as a dynamic activity involving the learner's participation in the process."

The Error/Mistake Distinction

As well as distinguishing between input and intake, Corder introduced the error/mistake distinction into modern debate. According to the 1967 paper, while an error is caused by the learner's lack of knowledge of the correct rules, mistakes are a reflection of problems in language processing. He makes use of Chomsky's performance/competence distinction and associates mistakes with failures in performance, while errors refer to failures in competence (James 1998). In his later writings, Corder (1981) makes the point that the diagnosis and treatment of errors is one of the fundamental skills of a teacher.

A Systematic View of Errors

Corder viewed errors as evidence of a built-in language learning system, which was of a dynamic, changing nature, but he also put forth the idea that errors are themselves systematic. During a particular stage of development, learners consistently use the same grammatical form, even though it is often different from the form used by a native speaker. This shows that errors are, to a large extent, both systematic and predictable (Ellis 1997). For example, an analysis of a student's L2 may reveal that errors in constructing the past tense form are prominent and that these errors follow regular patterns rather than being haphazard. This non-randomness of learner errors, according to Corder, could serve as a window to the learner's second language progress and also

provide evidence as to how the L2 is learned and structured.

Reasons for the Significance of Learner Errors

In his 1967 paper, the reasoning for investigating learner errors was laid out by Corder. He specified three ways in which errors are important, for teachers, researchers, and perhaps most importantly for learners themselves.

First, errors provide evidence of how far learners have progressed in their efforts to master L2 and additionally what remains for them to learn. For the teacher who takes the time to analyze them closely, errors can inform the procedures of instruction.

Second, for the researcher, examining learner errors can provide evidence of the process involved in how language is acquired, and also what strategies the learner engages in the process of language discovery.

Third, Corder contended that learner errors are most significant for the learners themselves as they are a means to test their hypothesis about the L2. He describes errors as being indispensable for the learner, asserting that they are something the learner uses in order to learn. In effect, language learning proceeds by a process of hypothesis testing, or trial and error (Howatt, 1997). For the learner, therefore, an awareness of missteps is vital for progress and interlanguage development.

Conclusion

In the years since publication, Corder's 1967 paper has proved highly original and influential. The pioneering insights laid out therein permeate SLA literature and research, as well as theories and practices of language

learning and teaching, four decades later. "The significance of learners' errors" focused attention on learner errors from a language processing and language acquisition perspective, and laid out the key idea that the learner makes a significant cognitive contribution to his or her learning (Lennon, 1991). To appreciate just how groundbreaking Corder's insights were, they must be viewed against the perceptions of L2 learning widespread at the time of the 1967 publication. He delineated: the influence of the L1 on the L2, the input and intake distinction, the built-in syllabus and transactional competence, the error and mistake distinction, the systematization of errors, and the significance of errors.

For its existence and direction, the field of SLA owes much to Professor Corder and his pioneering, 1967 paper. Due in large part to the lasting effects of this article, Selinker (1992) reported that Corder is accurately called by his French colleagues "le pere fondateur," or "the founding father" of SLA.

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Research Digest

Opinion & Perspective

The Blind Leading ...

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In this issue`s OP column Tom Anderson relates his experience and view of having a blind student in his writing class.

Last autumn I taught a basic level writing class to non-English majors at a large private university in the Kanto region. When I went into the classroom to teach the first class, I saw a young man with a folded up white cane and a Braille typewriter. My first reaction was "How in the world can I teach writing to a visually challenged student?"

After exchanging ideas with the scheduling coordinator by e-mail, we met with the student—who I shall refer to with the pseudonym of Mr. Suzuki—and discussed the situation and possible ways to deal with it. Mr. Suzuki made it clear that he really wanted to stay in the regular class, so I consented to this with the understanding that if things didn't work out well, we could make alternative arrangements. As it turned out, it was the right decision. He was a very diligent student whose efforts appeared to impress the other students.

The writing class met twice a week for twelve weeks. In the Tuesday class, students did a ten-minute free writing exercise. They wrote down the title and first sentence that I gave and then wrote as much as they could. Mr. Suzuki also did this on his Braille typewriter. The other students did a word count and recorded it on a graph which I kept.

Mr. Suzuki has a special software program at home that changes the Braille writing to Roman letters. At the beginning of the Friday class he told me his word count and I plotted it on his graph.

In the Friday class, students took fifteen to twenty minutes to write a letter in English to me, which I collected, read, and to which I wrote a response. Again Mr. Suzuki wrote his letter in Braille and gave me the English version at the beginning of the next class. While the class was doing their free writing. I would read and write a response to his letter, which one of his group members would read to him at the end of class.

Students in my writing class do various group activities. For example, I have them do a blackboard game based on the children's game *shiritori*, in which student teams write words on the blackboard that begin with the letter that ends the previous word. Mr. Suzuki was paired up with a classmate in his group, and when it was his turn, he would tell his word to his partner, who would then write it on the blackboard.

Students in my writing classes work in groups to write paragraphs. Mr. Suzuki was able to take an active role in this by telling sentences to the sighted group members, who would then write them down. He also had no difficulty in taking his turn as group leader. The other students were a great help to him, not only during class but also in helping him

to find his way past the obstacles of desks and chairs.

Students have to do a final exam in this course and naturally I didn't have him do this. Instead I gave him a topic and he wrote a Braille paragraph which he transcribed and which I collected in the next class period.

Overall, I think that my students and I were very impressed by the enthusiasm and effort of Mr. Suzuki , who I believe turned out to be a very good example for the other students. From having this experience I would totally agree with the administration's desire to integrate students with special needs into regular classes whenever possible. However, the main problem is that there is a reluctance to inform teachers beforehand, something which I believe is the result of an overreaction to the new privacy law. This is clearly unfortunate because it doesn't give the teachers any time to make special arrangements for the students, and, as a result, we end up having to deal with this on top of the normal hectic schedule at the beginning of the semester. Hopefully, administrations will change their view on this matter in the future. However, I would like to end this article by emphasising my belief that having Mr. Suzuki in class was a privilege for myself and my other students.

(Note: I would like to thank Phil Mc-Casland for encouraging me to write this article).

Wanted!
Early Issues of On CUE

The editors of *On CUE* seek early issues of this journal, from 1.1 through volume 7. Editorship has changed hands so many times over the years that some issues have been lost. We are particularly interested in finding a copy of the very first issue, as it is needed so we can register an ISSN. Please contact Mike Hood if you have a copy <mikehood85@yahoo.com>.

Opinion & Perspective

Why Are Universities Abandoning English Teaching for TOEIC Training?

James McCrostie

For inexplicable reasons, the popularity of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) continues to rise in Japan. Meanwhile, outside of Asia, the TOEIC remains little known. In 2003, people took the test 3.4 million times in sixty different countries. However, three million of these test-takers lived in Japan or Korea ("Pursuing a better TOEIC score," 2005). Furthermore, a large number of the test-takers were repeat customers; in fact, about one-third of Japanese examinees have taken the test three or more times ("Pursuing a better TOEIC score," 2005). In the rest of the world, however, it would seem that people prefer improving their English ability to raising their TOEIC score.

TOEIC's popularity in Japan stems mainly from its use by Japanese companies, which use TOEIC scores to decide which employees get posted overseas, receive promotions or raises, and even which applicants get hired. As a result, the number of Japanese university students taking the TOEIC rises and the negative impact on learning to use English communicatively increases. The test is currently having a particularly pernicious affect on university-level English education in Japan.

The notion that improving student TOEIC scores should be the main goal of post-secondary English education is currently sweeping through a lot of undefended minds in Japanese universities. Many universities have moved beyond simply offering TOEIC classes and have completely oriented their English programmes towards raising students' TOEIC scores. Nearly 400 Japanese universities force all their students to sit the TOEIC test ("Pursuing a better TOEIC score," 2005). Lots of universities force instructors to incorporate TOEIC scores into students' course grades or even accept TOEIC scores above a certain level as course credits. I argue that by doing so, these schools abandon efforts to improve their students' ability to actually use English.

Such misguided English programme "reform" ignores the fact that the TOEIC cannot assess English speaking or writing ability. The only thing that the TOEIC does well is test the ability to answer multiple choice exam questions. Educational Testing Service (ETS), the company that developed the TOEIC, contends that the test indirectly measures speaking and writing skills. However, this claim is based on quantitative gossip rather than quality research.

ETS' 1982 study, used to make the sweeping pronouncement that TOEIC indirectly measures communicative ability, proves to be less than rigorous (Hirai, 2002; Woodford, 1982). For example, writing skills received only a cursory examination. Subjects merely had to produce a twenty-five to forty word business "letter" in twenty minutes. To this

day, no objective research has shown that the TOEIC measures a person's ability to speak or write in English.

Probably as a result of the TOEIC's lack of popularity outside of Japan, the number of independent studies that have examined the test remains small. However, they are nearly unanimous in taking a critical stance towards the TOEIC (Chapman, 2003; Childs, 1995; Cunningham, 2002; Hirai, 2002). For example, one independent analysis by Michihiro Hirai, the Director of the Hitachi Institute of Foreign Languages, dismisses the test as "practically meaningless as a measure of writing skill" and concludes it "cannot be employed as a reliable measure of writing skills in business contexts" (Hirai, 2002, p. 7). The same study found the TOEIC an unreliable predictor of spoken English ability at the intermediate (450-650) score range, the same range that most Japanese companies require (Hirai, 2002, p. 5).

The TOEIC proves particularly unsuited for universities because it was never designed to measure improvement. In statistical jargon, the TOEIC's large standard error of measurement makes the test an unreliable gauge of learner progress. To be confident of showing even the slightest true improvement, a test-taker needs to increase their score by at least sixty-five points (Cunningham, 2002, p. 20). Practically, what this means is that the test cannot be used to see if a learner's English ability has improved in the short term.

A poor choice of subject matter further detracts from TOEIC's overall quality and suitability for universities. While the test's name combines the buzzwords "international" and "communication" it remains a test of business English. According to ETS, the TOEIC "measures the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment" (*TOEIC Examinee Handbook*, 2002, p. 5). Needless to say, Japanese university students are neither working nor in an international environment. To make matters worse, the TOEIC doesn't even test business English well. Rather, the test sprinkles a dash of superficial business subject matter over complex grammar questions and deliberately misleading listening passages.

While purportedly based on a needs analysis of international business, the TOEIC appears to have been written by professional test writers, possessing little knowledge of the business world. Even a study published based on data supplied by ETS questioned the relevance of the test. The study found that only about 40% of TOEIC questions actually dealt with authentic activities connected to business (Douglas, 1992).

Despite the TOEIC's many defects it remains puzzlingly popular with Japanese companies and workers. Perhaps Japanese salary men cannot be expected to know much about English language proficiency testing, but Japanese university professors should certainly know better. Regrettably, more and more misguided universities prefer to abandon English teaching for TOEIC training. Clearly, mindlessly following the recent fad of business demand for TOEIC scores remains easier for universities than the alternative—reducing class sizes and designing English courses to produce graduates who can actually use the language for purposeful communication. Japanese university professors should also take an active role in communicating to the public the TOEIC's litany of faults and putting pressure on ETS to improve the test.

North American university professors realized long ago that the TOEIC's sister test, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), a test of academic English, failed

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to test what it claimed. There was little correlation between a student's TOEFL score and their ability to function in an English speaking university. As a result of complaints and pressure, ETS introduced dramatic changes to the TOEFL.

In contrast, the TOEIC remains unchanged since its introduction twenty-seven years ago. Recently announced changes remain largely superficial. For the listening questions, the current American voices will occasionally be replaced with more exotic Canadian, British, and Australian speakers. Speaking and writing questions will supposedly be introduced at the end of 2006, but details are few and far between. Given the TOEIC's problems, they are unlikely to improve the test significantly. Regardless of any cosmetic changes to the test, university English programmes have no business pandering to the TOEIC and to those who blindly place their faith in TOEIC scores.

The supposed need to focus on entrance exams has largely sabotaged both junior and senior high school English teaching in Japan. Universities represent the last chance for students to learn how to actually use the English language. Unfortunately, universities are placing more and more emphasis on TOEIC scores, and once again putting the emphasis on esoteric knowledge and test-taking ability with no practical purpose.

Universities must resist the negative washback effect resulting from Japanese businesses' enthralment with TOEIC scores. Higher education should place more prestige and importance on producing graduates who can communicate using the English language. Such an emphasis would undoubtedly have a positive washback effect on Japanese business.

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Why is the TOEIC So Popular?

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While I understand James McCrostie's frustration with the prevalence of TOEIC courses at universities, I would suggest that the increasing use of TOEIC in universities is far from "inexplicable." University students are required to study English, at least in their first year, although many have neither interest nor confidence in their ability. Also, they do not expect to enjoy English classes or expect improvement. Therefore, universities try to create goals for students in order to provide motivation and to re-focus English study away from success in entrance examinations and toward a more practical future goal. The TOEIC represents a valid employment qualification within Japan and Korea; a high score is of immediate use in their job hunt. Recall any subject you disliked and felt incompetent at in high school. If you had to study it again, would you rather not receive a certified score showing some level of achievement?

Furthermore, for university administrators and students the TOEIC provides a good example of face validity (Bachman, 1990, pp. 285-289). That is, the TOEIC looks like a serious test of English because it resembles what students did in high school, and this in itself probably has a positive motivational effect on the students.

I have worked as a language trainer in a large Japanese company which used the TOEIC (in addition to assessment inter-views) to assess the English skills of each annual cohort of graduate new recruits. It was also used to select staff for international work and MBA sponsorship. Prior experience with the test and the test-taking skills it requires were helpful to the recruits, and some staff became TOEIC addicts, setting themselves target scores and taking the test year after year. This test-driven motivation helped them to maintain their English skills.

One interesting thing that I found out while working at this Japanese company was that although the TOEIC is produced by the Chauncey Group (a profit-making subsidiary of Education Testing Services, ETS), the idea for its creation came from Japan. The founders of the test's distributor in Japan (the Institute for International Business Communication, IIBC) and related companies developed the idea for the TOEIC and garnered support for a business English test from companies and the Ministry of Education. They then approached ETS to commission its design. The multiple choice TOEIC resembles other tests Japanese students have taken and is surely much less stressful than a computer-adaptive test like the TOEFL or a face-to-face assessment interview with a native speaker.

While the TOEIC can be taken at official test centers, it is easy to administer at the universities' convenience, as IIBC will send a package of test materials to universities or

other institutions; and though test-takers do not receive the official score certificate from privately administered tests, most institutions accept the uncertified score reports.

Finally, I would like to say that I do accept that there are limitations of the TOEIC test. As McCrostie says, the TOEIC only covers listening, grammar and reading comprehension. Other issues include the inappropriate uses of the test by companies (Childs, 1995), and the question of to what extent the TOEIC serves as an indirect test of writing and speaking (Chapman, 2005). However, despite these misgivings there are, as I have pointed out in response to James McCrostie's article, clear and logical reasons why the test remains popular in Japan.

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Active Learner Involvement in a TOEIC Class

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I believe TOEIC teaching can be done in way that is communicative, involves active learner participation, and makes use of the rationale for teaching TOEIC in Japan as Robert Brock has outlined above. Here I offer a few examples.

I teach students how the test is constructed. I involve students in this process by having them make their own test problems, beginning with the picture statements section. I collect and arrange the students' test problems into a test paper. In three lessons or less, students familiarize themselves with one of the TOEIC format testing procedures, gain understanding of the purpose and design of distracters, and can feel gratification when people get their question wrong.

The short dialog section of the TOEIC requires the ability to grasp the main points of a situation or context quickly. I use the English Through Drama approach (Nomura, 1985; Via, 1976) which encourages anyone producing a dialog to imagine the situation and speak appropriately with context in mind. I assigned different dialogs to pairs of students and required them to come up with a complete situation, using 5Ws 1H (defining a situation by stating when, where, to whom,

why, what, and how a dialog takes place), and perform the dialog in a way which shows awareness of context. From this activity the students learn to set a conversation into context and begin to grasp details of the real-life situations on which the dialogs are based.

To give my low-level students the stamina to listen to the longer sections, and to make the TOEIC practice enjoyable I have students transcribe songs. I assign songs with a high level of natural, variant English to help students become sharper at detecting difficult sound-alike distracters in the TOEIC.

The fun part of English is communication. Test takers tend to forget that the problems represent not just a linguistic but also a communication challenge. Richard Via, quoted by the U.S. State Department's Office of English Language Programs (2006), states that "a play is all communication...communication between actor and actor and between the actor and the audience as they view the play." By returning TOEIC English to its communicative base, I help students to raise their TOEIC scores and have 30 classes that are interesting and worthwhile.

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If you would like to comment on any of the views expressed in this column, please write to the Opinions and Perspectives Editor: fordkeith@hotmail.com

Opinion & Perspective

CUE's Featured Speaker Workshop at the National Conference

Sara Cotterall
Talking to Learners: Are We on the Same Page?

Sunday, 5 November: 12:00-14:00; 4,000 yen.
See Pre-Conference Supplement or the July *TLT* for more details.

Using Outside-of-Class Language Opportunities

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From the Chalkface

Summary

Students use an "Outside of Class Encounters" chart (see Appendix) to monitor the extent to which they are taking advantage of opportunities to use and practice English that exist in their immediate environment as well as creating and discovering new ones. Students also use the chart to evaluate the effectiveness of the opportunities. In addition, students have a chance to share with classmates their experiences in using the opportunities.

Rationale

Oxford (1990) notes that classroom time alone is not sufficient in providing students with enough practice opportunities to reach a moderate to high proficiency—students must be able to find or create their own opportunities. Although many students may claim otherwise, opportunities to encounter and use English outside the classroom are not as scarce as they may think. Unfortunately, many students do not take advantage of these opportunities. The purpose of this activity is to help students become more aware of outside of class opportunities and use them to practice and develop their English skills.

Students

This activity is designed for university students, but it can also be used with high school students.

Time Required

Initial introduction: 30 minutes. Sharing and Evaluation: 10 minutes.

Procedure

1. Raising Awareness (10~15 minutes)

Hold a class discussion on outside of class practice opportunities. I begin by telling students that I can speak Japanese but have never had a formal Japanese lesson—I study and practice on my own using whatever "free" materials or opportunities I can find in the city I live in. Have the students brainstorm prospects to encounter and practice English outside of class and list them on the whiteboard. Next, ask the students which prospects they have actually taken advantage of. Students usually create a list of about eight opportunities, but only one or two of them actually claim to have used any of them. Encourage these students to talk about experiences they have had, positive or negative, with the items in the brainstorm. It is essential at this point to emphasize the importance and benefits of students making use of outside of class opportunities to practice and develop their English.

2. Teach the Activity (10 minutes)

Explain the instructions of the activity to the students and define its purpose as a learning strategy. Teach students the procedure for filling out the chart and tell them how frequently charts should be turned in. I usually require students to turn in charts every two weeks.

3. Set a Goal

The goal gives the students a tangible measure of their progress and provides motivation. For the initial chart, I usually have all students set a goal of 30. On each subsequent chart, students are free to set their own goals but should attempt to set a higher yet attainable goal each time.

4. Sharing and Evaluation of Practice Opportunities (10 minutes)

I usually provide ten minutes of class time on the days students turn in their charts for them to share their experiences with specific opportunities. I have them talk in groups about opportunities they used, whether they thought it was beneficial to them and to what extent. If any students discovered or created a new practice opportunity, I have them share it with the class.

5. Assessment of Activity

I inform the students at the beginning that the main purpose of this activity is for them to improve their English skills by using and encountering the language outside of regular class time. Participation in and completion of this activity is considered part of regular class work. Keeping in mind that the main focus is awareness raising and usage and not volume of use, I factor it in to their final grade as on a simple "do/didn't do" basis, much like many teachers do for class participation.

I have found this to be the simplest way and have rarely had students fail to complete or turn in a chart. In the past, I have found that giving this activity a numeric score or making it a percentage of their final grade causes students to set unrealistic goals, or be dishonest about the types of opportunities they used and number of times they used them.

This activity does take regular monitoring. I make it a point to remind the students once a week to fill out their charts and occasionally ask students what opportunities they are using. When there are doubts as to the authenticity of the students' claims, I have found it useful to ask students specific questions about the activities in doubt or ask for proof.

Reflections

After using this activity the first time, I had several positive reactions from students. They were delighted to learn that opportunities to use English existed in their immediate environment and that many of them were free. Students were also excited to apply what they have been studying at school in the real world. During the *sharing and evaluation* sessions, they presented several original ideas they had for using English, such as web-pages, chat groups, English diaries, translating signs at their part-time jobs and volunteer opportunities. Finally, I noticed increased confidence and motivation among my students. Not only were they using English in the real world and succeeding, they were actively trying to find more ways to do it.

I began using this activity with third-year university English majors who have one 90-minute class per week. These students had lessons three times a week in their first year, twice a week in their second year and were upset about a decrease in the amount of class

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time they had to use English. They wanted more opportunities to use English and I wanted to expose them to situations where they could use what they were learning.

I have since expanded the activity to all of my English major classes as well as some non-major and high school classes. I use this activity the whole academic year and in some cases require it as part of summer vacation homework.

References

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Appendix

Outside of Class Encounters

Date: _____~_____   Goal: _____

Practice Opportunity	First time to use this opportunity?	Used this week? Yes = 1 No = 2	How many times?	Is it effective? 1-10
a. Eikaiwa lessons	YES/NO			
b. Speaking English with others outside of class	YES/NO			
c. Watching English movies, television, etc.	YES/NO			
d. Listening to English radio, music, etc.	YES/NO			
e. Reading English books, magazines, etc.	YES/NO			
f. Self-study other than class work or homework	YES/NO			
g. Visiting English environments	YES/NO			
h. English e-mail, Internet, chat, etc.	YES/NO			
i. Your original ideas: _____ _____ _____ _____	YES/NO			
Totals	A ("YES"):	B:	C:	D:

My score for this chart (BxC): _____
Did you reach your goal? Y/N
My next goal is: _____

Adapted from "Opportunity Knocks!" (Oxford, 1990, p. 180-181)

Using Collages to Raise Students' Awareness of Global Issues

David A. Prucha
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Introduction

One of the most critical issues facing our planet today is that of the extensive damage done to the environment as a result of pollution. Rivers, lakes and oceans have become contaminated, forests are razed, and the quality of our air continues to decrease. A massive global increase in human waste over the past few decades renders many waste disposal systems ineffective. The teaching of such critical issues "[is] so pressing that [it demands] a response from the entire educational community" (Stempleski, 1993). Troll (1996) further states language teachers should "provide knowledge about how to act now and in the future to stop the deadly pattern of environmental exploitation and destruction in our world" (p.16).

The following lesson plan is designed to raise student awareness of critical global issues by getting them to create large visual posters with an environmental theme. This lesson should also include grammar points, new vocabulary, an interactive poster-making task, and a subsequent presentation of a poster session followed by a wider discussion on student-chosen theses. This lesson can also be easily expanded into a "multi-period project" lesson (Tomei, Glick & Holst, 1999), with more time spent on each component. Content-based learning, "particularly the use of socially oriented themes" (Jacobs, 1995), often connects students with current themes and issues that are occurring in the outside world. I am always impressed with the alacrity and genuine interest my students exhibit while undertaking the tasks involved.

Aims of the Lesson

1. Allow students an opportunity to creatively explore ways to bring about an increased awareness of environmental or global issues by creating visual representation of their ideas.

2. Improve students' use of lesson-related vocabulary, especially through the use of a particular L2 grammar structure. In this lesson plan, I have chosen to use the construction of advisability sentences.

3. Generate student production of ideas and opinions by having students comment on and field questions about the meaning of their collages.

4. Promote skills associated with collaborative learning, including teamwork, sharing of ideas, students helping each other to learn, and raising the level of critical thinking.

Intended Level

I originally used this lesson plan to fit into a curriculum for sociology majors at a public university in Japan. I focused on intermediate to upper intermediate levels, but because of the flexibility of this activity, I have observed

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an enthusiastic response among a variety of levels, from lower level, first-year students with basic English levels, to higher levels of the upper intermediate range. Making a few adjustments in the syntactical structures of the grammatical and lexical portions is very simple, and offers teachers the leeway to make this a fun and creative lesson.

Lesson Length & Class Size

As presented this lesson is intended for one 90 minute class. Because of the collaborative nature of this lesson, students should work in groups of four to five. Therefore, the ideal class size is between 15 and 30 students. It is possible with larger groups, but requires careful time management.

Preparation and Materials

Prepare a handout with vocabulary related to the main theme, and include a few exercises for practicing a grammar point, such as the advisability statements I have used. Bring the following materials to the class: glue, scissors, poster paper/board, thumbtacks/tape/board magnets (for hanging finished posters), color markers/pens/crayons, and plenty of old newspapers, brochures, magazines, and any other printed material. Pictures are very useful, so the more color in the student posters, the more attractive your students' collages will appear.

Procedure

1. Vocabulary Building (10 minutes)

After organizing the students into groups of four or five, give the students a list of useful words. For example:

Verbs: *to conserve, to protect, to pollute, to litter, to recycle, to reduce, to increase, to decrease, to damage*

Separable Verbs: *to use up, to throw away*

Nouns and Noun Phrases: *the rain forests, the environment, the natural resources, the atmosphere, the pollution, the carbon dioxide, the garbage/trash/litter*

Adjectives: *rare, endangered*

As all of these words have dictionary meanings, elicit the meaning from students before asking them to look the words up in their dictionaries. I have also given pieces of paper with the words written in English or Japanese, and asked the students to ask other groups the meaning.

2. Grammar & Vocabulary (10 minutes)

Students work together to practice using the new vocabulary.

Here, I have a prepared handout (see Appendix) which asks the students to connect clauses to make advisability statements.

3. Choosing Themes (10 minutes)

In this part, I have the students create a sub-theme related to the main theme. I ask them to write it down on a piece of paper together with a short statement modeled on the advisability sentences. The statements should support their themes. For example:

Theme: *Recycle Old Newspapers!*

Supporting Statement Using Advisability Model: *We should recycle our newspapers so that we can reduce our garbage.*

4. Production (40 minutes)

Students support their themes and statements by cutting out pictures and text related to their topic of interest, and gluing them onto poster board to make a collage. I encourage students to use the words in the newspapers, or cut out individual letters, in order to come up with some new support words and create further meaning for their

particular themes. This is a good opportunity to walk around the classroom, observing student productions and giving comments or suggestions. I especially encourage creativity during this portion of the lesson, because the more abstract and artistic these collages become, the more questions they will elicit during the discussion part in the next section. I can also usually find out how much students are learning based on how closely their choice of pictures and text relate to their themes and supporting statements. I make it a point to ask students to explain the meaning of their choice of support pictures and text. This gives them the opportunity to show me how well they understand their themes. I also remind students of how much time they have left, which helps with time management.

5. Discussion (20 minutes)

In the final part of the lesson, students hang their collages on the blackboard or bulletin board, and spend a few minutes enjoying the creative productions of their peers. I then open the floor up to discussion by asking each group to prepare several questions for each collage. I find this part is easier if the creators of the collage stand next to it and face the other students in order to answer questions about their theme and how the collage supports that theme.

Assessment

Because this lesson plan is based on some of the principles of cooperative learning, students are actively engaged in the learning process itself, assessing student learning is fairly straightforward. Some of the 'mileposts' that teachers can look for to check if learning is in fact taking place, include observing how well the posters match the themes created by the students. If, for example, the theme is *Let's Keep the Earth Green*!,

a group poster with pictures of green trees or a drawing of a green globe would be appropriate. Another way of checking student learning is by asking them why they chose certain pictures and text. They can also be asked to reproduce advisability statements, which would show how well they are able to retain the grammar points. A simple dialogue for this might be as follows:

Teacher: *Can I throw this garbage on the floor?*

Student: *No, you can't.*

Teacher: *Why not?*

Student: *You should not litter because it pollutes the environment.*

One of the aims of teaching cooperative learning is to get students to apply what they have learned to wider contexts in the real world. With this in mind, I have found that using a simple take-home checklist as a follow-up assignment that keeps students focused on environmental concerns can usually provide a few insights into how much of an effect the poster-making activity had on raising student awareness of environmental issues. Some examples of items that I have used in the checklist are:

This week, I will try to remember to do the following:

1. *Turn off unnecessary lights.*
2. *Recycle plastic bags at the grocery store.*
3. *Watch a TV documentary on an environmental issue.*
4. *Use only reusable chopsticks instead of throwaway ones.*
5. *Separate garbage for recycling.*

Variations

Because of its flexible nature, this lesson can be used as a project to compliment another lesson that deals with global issues, or

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it can be a complete cooperative language learning lesson that brings together and focuses on the major elements and skills of language learning: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Having used this plan for several years now, I am still revising it in order to tailor it to different levels of students, and in order to continue to find new and creative ways to implement this plan in my classroom.

1. Set a good example. Ask the students to bring old and recyclable materials from their homes, thereby getting them directly involved in a recycling effort.

2. Use recycled paper for all handouts, and let the students know this fact.

3. Elicit background knowledge by doing a short brain-storming warm-up at the beginning of class "to invigorate the class" (Riley, 2001). Also, Richards' "word-mapping" (1990) is useful for getting students' schema activated. For example, ask students to make a list of environmental problems around the globe, and what kind of daily habits their families or communities are doing to address them. True/False quizzes are also very helpful.

4. For a deeper topic discussion, narrow themes to specific areas of environmental concerns. For example, have all groups concentrate on specific themes related to one topic, such as endangered animals, recycling efforts, water/air pollution, natural resource conservation, etc…

5. Share your students' environmental awareness posters with students from other classes by asking for permission to hang the finished posters in the hallway, or at least be allowed to leave them hanging in the classroom for a week. The posters then make excellent visual review of vocabulary for the following week.

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Appendix

Please draw a line to connect these sentences.

1. We should protect the rain forests	because it damages our atmosphere.
2. We should not litter	so that we can reduce the amount of our garbage.
3. We should conserve energy	because many rare plants and animals live there.
4. We should recycle	because our planet has limited natural resources.
5. We had better decrease carbon dioxide	because it pollutes our environment.

My Candy

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Summary

Drawing upon the principles of stimulus-based teaching as outlined by Woodward (2001), this lesson utilizes a common object as a stimulus for producing a wealth of descriptive language. Though specifically devised for a writing unit, it could easily be adapted for use in an English communication course.

The basic aim of this lesson is to encourage students to engage their immediate physical environment and record that interaction in writing. By choosing a familiar object and giving students very specific tasks and appropriate guidance, it is hoped that students will a) discover that even the most mundane objects can be interesting if considered carefully, and b) learn that there is always something to say—topics surround us all the time if we are willing to look for them. Furthermore, this lesson can help writing students overcome writer's block by showing them that by following a simple, logical procedure, they can achieve worthwhile results while focusing maximum attention on the task at hand. All of this from a simple lesson built around a small piece of candy!

Students

Learner English Level: Elementary and above.

Target Learner: This lesson works well with college students, especially English majors studying on a four-skills track, where it can be introduced as part of a specific writing class. The complexity of the task can be easily altered to suit the students' level.

Time Required

Preparation Time: Minimal—you'll need only stop and buy enough candy for all students.

Activity Time: Varying—depending on student level and the depth to which you expect students to go with the activity.

Materials

Writing materials and one piece of candy for each student, plus a second, different piece of candy if you plan to assign homework. When you buy the candies, look for opaque packaging to encourage the student to imagine the contents. Also, a variety of flavors, shapes, and textures is desirable; you don't want 32 students describing exactly the same thing. Hard candies are preferable, as they will last longer and give students more time for reflection.

Rationale

Not only does this activity provide a fun way to teach descriptive, rich language, but perhaps more importantly it stimulates an often abundant latent knowledge possessed by the Japanese student learner. Furthermore, this activity aims to introduce the idea

of time-lines and progression in a way all students can relate to and use. Although my original intention was to produce a lesson for a writing class, teachers may adapt the concept for application to other contexts.

Progression

This activity is designed to get students to describe their candy at three progressive stages of experience. The following overview may be useful.

Before: Describe not only the package's physical aspects (i.e., color, material, shape, size, weight, sound, smell, etc.) but also conceptualize the possible smell, or the taste and texture in the mouth and the emotions or images that would correlate accordingly.

During: Describe how the candy feels in the mouth, both physically and in respect of the taste. In regards to both be exact. Is it; smooth? rough? heavy? light? big? small? Does it move easily around in the mouth? What does it taste like? Is it; sweet? sour? fruity? Does it last a long time or does it dissolve quickly? Does it remind you of anything?

After: What is felt both physically and emotionally after having eaten the candy? What kind of lingering taste (if any) is left in the mouth? How is the feeling now compared with before the task?

Don't forget to focus on all of the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Procedure

Step 1

Draw a horizontal line across the blackboard, then draw four short vertical lines so as to make three sections:

|_____|_____|_____|

Write the words *before, during* and *after* in consecutive sections:

| before | during | after |

Step 2

Clarify the concept of progression as needed. Depending on the level, you might give students initial examples and then elicit more to illustrate the principle of time progression. For example, just above the category "during," you might draw a simple picture of a building and label it "college." Then either elicit ideas from the class or call on students individually to say what they did before (i.e., ate breakfast, rode the train, etc.) and what they will do while they are here (i.e., study, eat lunch, etc.) and finally what they are going to do after school. At this initial stage, the goal is simply to ensure they understand the idea of progression in three distinct phases, not the conjugation of verbs.

Step 3

Once students have grasped the concept of progression, connect it to the task they are about to perform. Explain that they are about to be given a piece of candy and that they have to describe how they "experience" it in three progressive stages.

Step 4

Clarify the type of language students are expected to produce. On the board write: *appearance, taste* and *feeling*. Make three columns. Elicit more vocabulary to correspond to the three target columns and put them on the board. Alternatively, you can just go straight to Step 5. If you skip ahead, you might want to return to this point later (before Step 8) to ensure students have a significant body of vocabulary to draw upon.

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Step 5

Show the students one candy (unopened) and get them to call out words they would associate with the candy's appearance. You should get an array of words connected to the packet's shape, color, size, weight, and texture. You may need to begin with a few examples to get them started. Proceed through the other two categories. Note that this vocabulary corresponds mainly to the *before* part of the activity.

Step 6

Open the packet and show them the candy, again gather vocabulary and put it on the board in the appropriate section. You might pass the candy around to elicit descriptions of touch and smell. Remember to clarify any new vocabulary for the lower-level students.

Step 7

Have students take out three sheets of paper, on which they should write: *before, during* and *after*.

Step 8

This is the main part of the lesson. Give one candy to each student. Individually, have them go through the stages, writing only words and short notes to describe their perceptions of the candy before, during, and after eating it. Tell students that they need not write full sentences, as this is only a brainstorming activity. Encourage them to be creative! Monitor students as they work and keep them on task; answer questions and deal with problems as necessary.

Step 9

If time allows, have students transform their notes and vocabulary into three para-graphs to explain their progressive percep-tions. Alternatively, you could assign this for homework or continue the work in the following class meeting.

Variations

This plan represents one route (of which there are many) to the goal. You might use an entirely different object (e.g., buttons, films, cities, etc.) and have the students begin to produce language *before* actually engaging directly with the source of the lesson. Have students begin to conceptualize more than they are typically encouraged to. Have them then record their conjectures following the same processes outlined above. For example give them the title of a film or a painting. Ask them to conceptualize what the subject might be about, once they have recorded that show them the picture or film and have them record their thoughts. Once that is done have them compare and make post-task ob-servations. This is simply a short example, the variants of which are endless and all of which surely serve to furnish the learner with the much-needed skills of conceptualization and conjecture.

Extensions

Have the students either:

i) Read and correct another student's work; ask follow-up questions, etc. (Peer correction model)

ii) Have the students read their work out loud and present it to the others in small groups; ask follow-up questions, etc. (Pres-entation model)

Homework

This activity works very well as a home-work assignment for a writing class. I have had success by first doing a watered-down

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version in class (because of time constraints) and then giving them another (different) candy to write about for homework. When I have done this, I have consistently found the homework is of a much higher standard—not simply because it is their *second time around*, but also because in a more isolated environment they have an opportunity to focus more thoroughly on the task at hand.

If you plan to assign this idea as part of a journal, you might consider continuing the theme of *before*, *during* and *after* with other writing topics (see *Variations* above). I have found that once students grasp the concept and realize they can easily produce three-times more writing than before, they really seem to take to the idea.

Reflections

Since I first devised and implemented this lesson some 5 years ago, I have had nothing but success with it. Naturally I have honed my delivery and made improvements to the procedure. Teachers adopting this lesson are invited to see this as a platform on which to add their own ideas, modifying it to suit their own classes, objectives, and teaching styles. I personally like to teach in a way that challenges and engages students, giving them the opportunity to apply their English skills in the widest possible manner. To that end I have found this lesson works well. Every time that I have used this I have been interested to see how students approach the task, amazed by what this very simple idea can bring out of the students. In going through a specific process the student is empowered with the means to tap a mass of dormant vocabulary. This lesson does require careful explaining at the beginning, but once the students know they are getting a treat, and a break perhaps from a dull routine, you will find their attention is sustained.

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Cyberpipline
Video Project Resources

Steven Snyder

A lot of us use video in our classes or have video related activities. Recently, I tried doing a video project with some seminar students that worked out pretty well. Video projects for students are wonderful for a handful of students and something that has been around for a long time. Creating your own video content for classes is much more ambitious, but with the tools available today it is indeed possible. The first problem I had was finding programs that would work with my university students. Then, I had to find resources that would actually work on my older equipment and that did not cost a fortune. Here are a few of the websites I found that you may find useful.

Stagetools
http://www.stagetools.com

An alternative to large integrated Non-Linear Editing (NLE) packages is simple stand alone tools for specific video treatment. Stagetools has programs that work both ways: as stand alone task-specific tools and as plug-ins for NLEs. *MovingPicture* is the core program by Stagetools—this program allows you to digitally pan and zoom still photographs, also know as the "Ken Burns Effect." *MovingPicture* is simple and easy to use, but very powerful. There is a timeline for setting key frames and audio, but it is transparent to use. Zooming and panning are con-trolled by moving a superimposed window over the photograph. In fact, I do not start my students out on an editing program, instead I have them play with *MovingPicture* and they quickly learn many editing skills as well as conceptual skills needed to use NLEs. Most NLEs and power user effects suites are simply too complicated for many teachers and their students, but with *MovingPicture* they can achieve impressive effects within a short time. Stagetools products are available for both PC and Mac users and the plug-ins will fit with a large number of advanced NLEs. Another program from Stagetools is *MovingParts,* which allows you to make highlights and other effects over video; however, this tool is strictly a plug-in for video editing programs. The last program from Stagetools is *MovingChart,* which makes a movie out of charts or data. For video projects by students or teachers, *MovingPicture* is the program to get, but also think seriously about adding the rotation option as it is well worth the price. *MovingPicture* exports to .avi, .mov and .swf formats.

Desktop Video at About.com
http://desktopvideo.about.com

Generally, I am not a great fan of About.com, but the information on desktop video really deserves mentioning here. The website has a lot of procedural information about editing tools and video techniques,

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plus reviews on software, DVD burners and camcorders. The site begins with "Top 10 Articles to Help You Get Started with Desktop Video Editing," and they really are good articles that can move you from raw beginning to functional in a very short time. Also, this site has tons of links to equipment and other tools.

Forbidden Technologies
http://www.forbidden.co.uk/products/

This company has, at last count, six products that deliver Java-based video on-line. Java video has several advantages: detection of connection speed, bypassing firewalls, and very fast download time. For online courses, the fast download time is very attractive. The basic product is FORweb, which produces video content for webpages. The other products are logical extensions of FORweb for various needs. FORlive, makes live video on websites, FORmail makes video via email, FORpresentation creates slideshow/movies for web-based presentations, FORscene is an online DV editing system, and FORmobile is a mobile standard video tool and hosting service.

Non-Lineal Editing Systems (NLEs)

If you are a Mac user then you have the great, user-friendly *iMovie* <http://www.apple.com/ilife/imovie/>. If you are a power user then you probably already know about *Final Cut Pro* <http://www.apple.com/finalcutstudio/finalcutpro/>, a tremendously powerful program. On the PC-side, things are much more complicated. The high end programs, such as *Adobe Premiere Pro* <http://www.adobe.com/uk/products/premiere/> and effects programs such as *Adobe After Effects* <http://www.adobe.com/products/aftereffects/>, are not just expensive, they require very powerful computers with special setups. Ulead products <http://www.ulead.com/store/store.htm> are a less expensive and less difficult to learn option.

For inspiration, or simply for the fun of it, **atom films** < http://www.atomfilms.com/> is a site dedicated to short films. Pretty mixed bag, but interesting. Do yourself a favor and check out the movie **Spin.** You can access it through atom films or you can go to the producer's site at **Double Edge Films** <http://www.doubleedgefilms.com>. There are a number of movies with the name *Spin*, but this one is… well, see for yourself.

2006 Pan SIG Conference Authentic Communication: Process and Purpose

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Overview

The 5th annual JALT Pan-SIG Conference was held at Tokai University in Shizuoka, Japan, from May 13-14. This year's conference was sponsored by four of JALT 's Special Interest Groups (Bilingualism, Pragmatics, Testing and Evaluation and Teacher Education), along with the Shizuoka Chapter. With three plenary speeches and a large number of presentations, poster sessions, workshops, colloquia, and commercial exhibits, there was something of interest for everyone.

Day 1

Dr. James Dean Brown's informative and entertaining plenary speech, *"Whyzit importan' ta teach reduced forms?"* kicked off the conference. He spoke about the features of connected speech, including weak forms, reduction, linking, contraction, assimilation, elision and intrusion. He also talked about the stigma of "lazy" English. Many teachers demand their students to use "proper" English. However, connected speech is neither "lazy" nor "sloppy". It is even present in very formal speech. Brown included personal anecdotes, describing the collection process of connected speech forms during his research. He also explained his ability to use two very different language registers appropriately: "army English"

register, which relies heavily on profanity and "English with mother" register, which is very formal and proper. He spoke on the importance of teaching connected speech, giving eleven reasons. Brown concluded by treating the conference attendees to a sneak peek at his upcoming textbooks.

Eddy White of Tokyo Woman's Christian University reported on the findings of a pilot study conducted in 2005 in his well-attended presentation *"Using self-assessment to promote active student engagement."* By way of introduction, he listed the advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment. In a pilot study, he gave the students a self-assessment checklist with six categories: attendance & participation, being attentive and completing tasks, speaking English, active listening, speaking Japanese, and overall effort and attitude. Then three times during the semester students evaluated themselves on a four-point scale ranging from "seldom true for me (passive)" to "almost always true for me (very active). At the end of the semester, an additional survey was conducted about self-assessment. Preliminary results indicate that overall the students found self-assessment both important and useful.

Jane Nakagawa from Aichi University of Education conducted a workshop entitled *"Active learning in the classroom."* To start off, participants described their learning situ-

ations. All had something in common: large university classes with students of various levels of ability and motivation. Nakagawa briefly introduced the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and Multiple Intelligences (MI) models. In an attempt to sustain active participation, she uses a variety of activities. To illustrate this, workshop participants were given handouts from Nakagawa's textbook "*Learn to use English, use English to learn.*" She encouraged workshop participants to discuss ways to use, modify, and adapt these activities for their particular classes. Nakagawa also gave some practical tips such as the one I personally found useful concerning classroom attendance and group administration. At the start of the semester, the students write small name cards to be placed on their desks. Nakagawa does not use a seating plan, but before the beginning of each class, she "randomly" places the name cards on the desks—making the seat assignments for the day. After class begins, taking attendance is simple—the name cards at the empty desks are collected and the respective students are marked absent. These cards can also be used for making small groups. This is a very useful and simple tip to implement.

Day 2

Day 2 opened with **Dr. John C. Maher**'s plenary speech, *"Knowing about Language, Knowing about Bilingualism: A 'Language Awareness Project' in Japan."* Maher's informative speech covered a number of topics. First, he mentioned some popular language myths such as French is a romantic language and women speak too much. He then spoke of the languages of Japan from a historical perspective and two contrasting models describing the construction of the Japanese language. He also discussed Japanese Pidgins and Creoles. Finally, he described a survey of 973 first-year university students, which consisted of 61 questions about bilingualism, multilingualism, and emotional and gender associations among languages. Maher presented many findings including the fact that most of the students wished that they had started to learn a foreign language at a younger age. The majority thought that ethnicity was the most important feature of language. And surprisingly they preferred British English to American English, but would prefer their children to learn American English! The data analysis of all 61 questions has not been completed yet, but we can expect them to be published in the future.

"Publishing as a Mode of Teacher Education" was the title of the Teacher Education Colloquium. It consisted of four short talks followed by a lively discussion. **James Venema** of Nagoya Women's University gave some practical tips about publishing such as becoming a reader before becoming a writer; finding topics to write about; writing appropriately (i.e. a paper for a master's program vs. an article for a journal): selecting suitable venues for your articles; joining or forming a support group; and keeping copies of everything. **Paul Tanner** of Nagoya City University described the numerous benefits of research: reading ESL publications to learn new points of view and acquire knowledge; learning about teaching and research; applying research to solve problems. He shared how writing articles has personally benefited him by helping him to develop and clarify his ideas. Moreover, by applying the ideas he has learned from research he has new themes for action research in his own classroom. This action research helps improve classroom activities, while providing a forum for publishing research. His specific examples included: the problem of students relying on the teacher to improve writing, and whether

(and how much) a teacher should do error correction on student essays. His reading of the research, interviews and surveys with his students helped to clarify student responsibilities and preferences, and to determine the extent of a teacher's responsibilities.

Mark Rebuck of Nagoya City University in his short talk *"Publishing as a Spur to Action"* highlighted several ways teachers can benefit from publishing papers. First, publishing can motivate teachers to put their ideas into practice. Second, he introduced the "pinball effect" of research writing: the way in which one paper brings forth an idea that often leads to another. Third, writing is a process by which a teacher's own ideas are codified. Writing is thus a way for a teacher to see his or her mind on paper, an important process for developing a personal teaching philosophy. Finally, being alert to potential publishing opportunities keeps a teacher's mind open to new ideas.

Brian Cullen of Nagoya Institute of Technology described the influence of textbooks in his talk, *Textbooks and Teacher Education*. Cullen, an experienced textbook writer, shared his experiences with textbook committees, textbook users and textbook publishers. He also talked about textbooks from two perspectives – the writer's and the user's. His very practical handout provided 65 questions that should be addressed when writing a textbook. These same questions also allow the textbook user to think about the hidden assumptions in a textbook. Assumptions, that when examined, lead to a greater understanding of the role of the textbook, effective use of the textbook and even a greater understanding of language learning itself.

Reflections

As a first-time attendee, what attracted me to the PAN-SIG conference? Like many people, initially it was the plenary speakers. Although the conference is only five years old, I was surprised that there were three plenary speakers. I was also attracted by the practical nature of the conference, as the high number of workshops can attest. Finally, I was attracted by the low price.

After attending some great presentations and workshops, I found this conference to be very beneficial. One of the highlights for me (and I am sure many others) was the banquet at the Tokai University Marine Museum. The 1,000-yen banquet was an extensive, all-you-can-eat-and-drink buffet including sushi and *okonomiyaki*, made before our very eyes. In the middle of the large room where we dined, there was an impressive fish tank filled with sharks, manta rays and schools of barracudas and trevallies. We were also treated to soothing piano music and lively traditional Celtic music. Final verdict? See you at Pan-SIG 2007 at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University, in Sendai next year!

Conference Review

JALT 2006 CUE SIG Workshop Summary

'Talking to Learners: Are We on the Same Page?'
Sara Cotterall, Akita International University

The way we talk to learners conveys important messages about the nature of language learning, roles in the learning process and the purpose of classroom instruction. But how accurately does our classroom talk reflect our teaching philosophy? Previous research has found that teacher talk dominates in many language classrooms (e.g. Musumeci, 1996), that teacher talk can inhibit student involvement (Walsh, 2002), that teachers may speak to their learners in an unnatural way (Barker, 2006), and that there is often a mismatch between learners' and teachers' perceptions of the goal of language tasks (Block, 1996). Such concerns warrant attention. This workshop will explore the messages inherent in teacher talk by inviting participants to examine and discuss transcripts of classroom-based interactions between teachers and learners. Participants will also be invited to reflect on their practice and suggest guidelines for monitoring teacher talk.

References

Barker, D. 2006. 'Observing language classes in Japanese universities.' *The Language Teacher 30*(3), 11-18.

Block, D. 1996. 'A window on the classroom: classroom events viewed from different angles.' In K.M. Bailey and D. Nunan (Eds.), *Voices from the language classroom: Qualitative research in second language education* (pp.. 168-194). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Musumeci, D. 1996. 'Teacher-learner negotiation in content-based instruction: Communication at cross-purposes?' *Applied Linguistics 17*(3), 286-325.

Walsh, S. 2002. 'Construction or obstruction: Teacher talk and learner involvement in the EFL classroom.' *Language Teaching Research 6*(1), 3-23.

Call for Transcripts

Walsh (2002, p. 20) claims:

 Only by working with their own data are teachers likely to be able to modify their classroom verbal behaviour."

Therefore, in order to help make the workshop activities personally relevant, you are encouraged to record (audio or video) and transcribe 10-15 minutes of your own classroom interaction with your learners. *Be sure to explain why you are recording and ask permission to do so.* Please send the transcript to Sara Cotterall <saracotterall@aiu.ac.jp> before October 1st. This will enable Sara to make copies of the transcripts, so that we can examine and discuss interactions from a range of classroom contexts.