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ORE — A Pattern for Expressing Opinions

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In many English-speaking cultures, expressing opinions clearly is an important function of communicating. Additionally, giving support for opinions is necessary because the understanding of differences is highly valued in those cultures. Consequently, teaching students how to give and support their opinions is a focus of many language classrooms. However, for some cultures, expressing opinions different from the group is seen as a threat to the group's harmony. Therefore, it is often very challenging to encourage students to express their opinions in the classroom because their culture has trained them not to stand out. This hesitancy amongst students may also be caused by an uncertainty of how

to express opinions in a target language. Students often lack an understanding of specific techniques for expressing opinions within that target language. This article will introduce a pattern to aid students in expressing their opinions as well as classroom tasks incorporating this pattern.

英語圏の文化においては、自分の意見を明確に表現することがコミュニケーションをとる上で重要な要素です。さらに、その意見を補足説明することも必要です。なぜなら英語圏では、違いを理解するということが大変評価されているからです。学生に、自分の意見を述べ補足説明する方法を教えることは、多くの語学クラスでの焦点となっています。しかしながら中には、所属するグループと違う意見を出すことが、グループの調和を乱してしまうのではと考える文化もあります。そのため、学生に教室で意見を求めるのはいつも大変挑戦的なことです。それは、彼らの文化がなるべく目立たないように彼らを訓練しているからなのです。学生に蔓延するこの煮え切らない態度は、学んでいる言語での意見の表明方法があやふやであることに起因するのかもしれませんが。多くの学生が、学んでいる言語で意見を言うための特定の技術を理解していません。この記事では、学生が意見を述べるときの手助けとなるパターンを紹介し、またそのパターンとクラスの課題との組み合わせ方をも紹介します。

Introduction

This article discusses the challenge English teachers face in Japan when asking students to express their opinions. Interpretations as to why it is a challenge will be offered. A pattern to aid students in expressing their opinions will be introduced, as well as classroom tasks incorporating the pattern.

The Challenge

The following is a transcript of a conversation between a student and a teacher.

- Teacher: What do you think of platform boots?
 Student: ...Well...I like them.
 Teacher: Why?
 Student:Because.....I like them.

What is happening?

English Language teachers were asked to give possible reasons for the above student's inability to account for his own opinion. The teachers' perceptions fell into three categories: student's limited English skill, student's lack of knowledge of how to support his/her opinion in English, and differences in the teacher's and student's culturally-based attitudes toward expressing opinions.

Culturally differing primary communication goals

While acknowledging that a student's limited English skill and the lack of knowledge of how to support his/her opinion in English are important considerations, I believe the culturally differing communication expectations are the key to understanding what is happening in the dialogue.

In Japan, the goal in public communication tends to be maintaining group harmony ("wa"). As a result many people tend to withhold disagreement in public. Whereas Western culture's goal in public communication is more of deepening understanding of differences in opinion by giving reasons or examples to support one's opinion. In other words, while Japanese culture, places a

high value on maintaining group harmony, Western culture places a high value on understanding different points of view. In both cultures, the ultimate goal is the same—good human relations—it is just achieved in a different way.

Differences in social context

Additionally, social context makes a difference when it comes to expressing opinions.

In Japan, there is greater difference in individual behaviour between formal and informal contexts. In more formal situations, the tendency is greater to withhold disagreement in order to maintain harmony. It could be said that informality directly relates to an individual's comfort level in that the more comfortable a person feels, the greater the willingness to express her/his opinion.

Classroom context

This point can be applied to the classroom. If the teacher creates a classroom that enables the students to feel comfortable and secure, students may be more willing to express their individual opinions. Pair and small-group work gives students a non-threatening audience with whom to develop ideas that can then be shared with the class. Within this classroom context, students can then be encouraged to further develop and support their opinions.

The Pattern

The idea of supporting opinions may be new to students. However, if students are provided with an easy-to-follow pattern for supporting their opinions, their confidence share their ideas

will increase. A pattern, called ORE¹ (an acronym for Opinion, Reason, and Example), was created in response to the challenge of teaching content courses to novice-level students. The following are 4 classroom activities, which incorporate ORE.

Activity one: Introducing the ORE pattern to students. (Speaking + Critical Thinking)

At the beginning of a unit on clothing, I show students a picture of platform boots. In groups, students think of reasons why some people like platform boots and others do not. I then write each group's ideas on the board. Then I hand out "ORE — Pattern for Giving Opinions" (Appendix 1a and 1b) to the students, which shows one opinion, three different reasons for the opinion, and examples that explain each reason further. Also included is a conversation using one of the reasons for the opinion and the examples that correlate with it. Pairs read the conversation aloud. Then they think about their own opinion, and choose a reason and example(s) from the handout or the board. Class ends with pairs having a conversation about their opinions about platform boots using the model as a guide.

Activity 2: Identifying Parts of an Opinion Paragraph (Reading + Critical Thinking)

Later in the unit, I cut the opinion paragraph (Appendix 1b) into sentence strips and ask students to identify the opinion statement, three reasons, supporting examples and to identify the remaining sentence, which is the concluding sentence. In the end, sentence strips should be laid out in the correct order.

Activity 3: Writing an Opinion Paragraph (Writing and Reading)

I prepare students to write their own opinion paragraph by providing them with a list of possible opinion statements. They may select from this list or choose their own. For homework, they think of five reasons for the opinion they chose. In the next class, they show their partner the opinion statement and five reasons. Partners help select the three best reasons while also suggesting ideas for examples. Using this feedback, students write a draft of their paragraphs for homework using the paragraph from Appendix 1b as a model. The next day, partners read the draft and give suggestions for improvement. The paragraph is re-written and submitted for evaluation.

Activity 4: Small group discussion (Speaking and Critical Thinking)

As a homework assignment, I ask students to decide whether they agree or disagree with the opinions listed in Appendix 2 and to think of reasons and examples to support their opinions. Giving students time to think before the discussion allows them to focus on the actual exchange of ideas rather than on formulating their own ideas during the discussion. Statements from Appendix 2 are printed on cards for groups to use as prompts. I encourage groups to focus on understanding each person's ideas by asking for reasons and examples to clarify the other students' points of view, rather than pressuring them to change their opinions. Students choose cards that are of interest and are encouraged to discuss them in depth rather than attempting to finish all the cards.

In later units, I encourage students to express and support their opinions using ORE whenever possible. Students are told that the pattern is intended only as a guide to help in supporting their opinions.

Conclusion

This pattern is especially helpful for novice-level students who have limited English ability. Since ORE is a simple, memorable pattern, students can quickly access it when asked to express their opinions. It enables them to think further and deeper about a given topic as it reminds them of the importance of supporting their opinions. Consequently, their response is more comprehensible and clear. This builds students' confidence and gives them a sense of accomplishment in what they were able to communicate. Additionally, they feel comfortable asking each other for reasons to a stated opinion as a means of understanding the other's opinion. This in turn creates a context that values the expression of different opinions.

Note

1. **ORE** pattern (**O**pinion, **R**eason, **E**xample)—Developed in 1997 by the School for International Training's Tokyo Jogakkan Junior College Project, an Intensive English Program. In response to the challenge of teaching content courses to mostly novice-level English learners, ORE was created by 6 teachers: Sean Conley, Lois Scott-Conley, Karen Eilertsen, Valerie Hansford, Morris Kimura and Gina Thurston.
2. A more extensive version of this article, entitled *Aiding students in expressing their opinions*, first appeared in *CELE Journal II*: 14-23, published by Asia University's Center for English Language Education.

Appendix 1a

Figure 1. ORE–Pattern for Giving Opinions

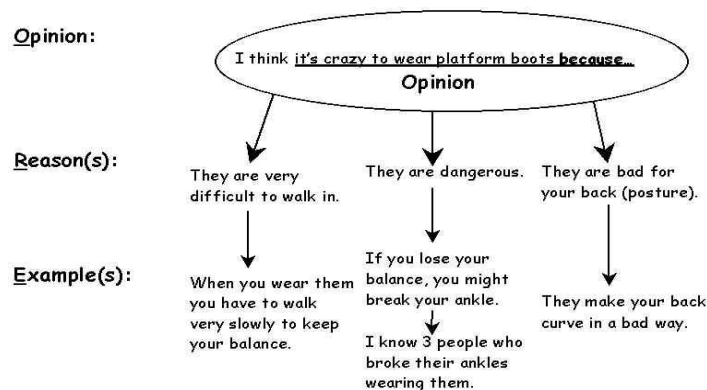


Figure 2. ORE in a conversation

- A: What do you think about platform boots?
Question
- B: Platform boots? I think it's crazy to wear platform boots.
Echo **OPINION**
- A: Crazy. Really! How come?
Echo React Follow-up Question
- B: mmm...because they are dangerous.
REASON
- A: Dangerous! What do you mean?
Echo Follow-up Question
- B: Well...if you lose your balance, you might break your ankle.
EXAMPLE
- A: Break your ankle! No! Really?
Echo React Follow-up Question
- B: Yes. Really! I know 3 people who broke their ankles wearing them.
EXAMPLE
- A: 3 people! Wow!
Echo React
- B: What about you? What do you think about platform boots?
Question
- Etc...

Appendix 1b

Figure 3. ORE in a paragraph

It's crazy to wear platform boots! *Opinion/Topic Sentence* They are very difficult to walk in. *Reason 1/Supporting Sentence*
People who wear platform boots usually have to walk very slowly to keep their balance. *Example 1/supporting Sentence* Platform boots are also dangerous. *Reason 2/ Supporting Sentence*
If the wearer loses her balance, she might break her ankle. *Example 2A/Supporting Sentence* I know 3 people who broke their ankles wearing platform boots. *Reason 3/Supporting Sentence*
Another problem is platform boots are bad for the wearer's posture. *Example 2B/Supporting Sentence* Wearing platform boots makes the back curve in a bad way. *Reason 3/Supporting Sentence*
For these reasons, people shouldn't wear platform boots. *Example 3/Supporting Sentence*
Summary/Concluding Sentence

Appendix 2: Opinion Statements

Think about the following opinions. Do you agree or disagree with them? Write notes about why you think so (ORE). You will use your notes to have a group discussion in class.

1. It's crazy to wear platform boots. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
2. Dressing for fashion is more important than dressing for the weather. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
3. The fashion of showing your belly-button (heso) is not sexy. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
4. Wearing public slippers at hot springs is dangerous for your foot health. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
5. Wearing blue jeans to a party is no problem. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
6. Wearing boots with a hakama looks strange. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
7. Dying your hair blond for Coming of Age Day is no problem. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
8. Wearing a fur coat to be fashionable is bad. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
9. People with tattoos should be allowed in the hot springs (onsen). Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
10. Harajuku fashion is interesting. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
11. University students should wear uniforms. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example:
12. Young people should wear traditional clothing. Agree/Disagree
Reason:
Example: