# Suggestions for creating teaching approaches suitable to the Japanese EFL Environment (日本のＥＦＬ状況に適した教授法創造の提案)

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As the emphasis on developing students' communicative abilities has increased in both junior and senior high schools, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Learning (TBL) have been attracting attention. However, in the Japanese EFL situation where there are insufficient opportunities for input or output, and in which many students learn English for academic purposes, CLT and TBL are not always successful. Thus teachers are obliged to create teaching approaches suitable to their situations. This paper proposes pragmatic and eclectic teaching approaches in the Japanese learning context.

中高生のコミュニケーション能力を高める必要から、コミュニカティブ言語教授法(CLT)やタスク重視の言語教授法(TBL)が注目を浴びている。日本での外国語としての、または学校科目の1つとしての英語を考えた場合、その適用には十分な配慮が求められる。本論では日本のEFL環境の実情に見合った有効で実用的な英語教育・授業を提案する。

## Considerations regarding students' needs and motivation

Motivation has a crucial role in aiding English learning and is a predictor of English-learning success. In improving students' motivation, teachers have to consider what it means to learn English in the Japanese EFL context. The Course of Study (MEXT, 2008) requires teachers in junior high schools to deepen students' understanding of languages and cultures through foreign language learning, to foster a positive attitude to attempting communication, and to develop basic communication abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It requires teachers in senior high schools to develop their students' practical communicative abilities, while deepening their understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages (MEXT, 2003). We cannot say with confidence that teachers and students are pursuing all of these goals, though teachers are certainly required to do so. It seems that Japanese students have dual orientations for learning English: a practical, realistic goal related to examinations and grades, and a vague idealistic goal related to using English for international or intercultural communication (Yashima, 2000). Since English has long been taught as a knowledge-based subject and students are studying it for high-stakes tests, teachers should take both goals into serious consideration. In entrance exams, students' knowledge or understanding of different cultures, attitudes toward communication, or practical communicative abilities are rarely measured. In this situation, where there may be a huge gap in the goal of learning between students and teachers, students cannot be highly motivated. Communicative activities and tasks, which are now coming into fashion, are not always compatible with students' needs and can demotivate exam-oriented students from learning. Ideally, dual goals should overlap or be integrated in the classroom through well-organized teaching. However, as long as the passing of knowledge-based exams continues to be the primary objective for many students, teachers may sometimes have to focus less on the ideal goal of learning English for communicative purposes. For

many students, a short-term realistic goal related to an examination is more concrete and immediate (Yashima et al, 2004). Teachers do not have to feel ashamed of conducting classes aimed mainly at realizing students' realistic goals, that is to say, success in exams. Communication-oriented classes, if teachers do not take account of tests at all, may be worthless for some students.

## Providing plentiful input opportunities

It is, without a doubt, crucial for learners to be exposed to a great amount of input to acquire or learn an L2. Krashen (1981) has taken a very strong position on the indispensability of input, claiming that comprehensible input is all that is required for successful acquisition. His argument is controversial in that he disregards the role of output, but there is no lack of theories or hypotheses that regard input as a precondition for learning (e.g., Gass, 1997; Robinson, 1995). Especially in the input-scarce Japanese EFL environment, in which junior and senior high school students do not have natural exposure to or actual need to use English outside the classroom, teachers have to maximize the use of English in their classes. English should not only be the object but the medium of instruction. Thus, English classes conducted in English are highly justified.

However, in creating rich and meaningful classes, teachers sometimes have to use complicated, abstract, or subtle Japanese expressions to convey true intentions and meanings to students, and this cannot easily be done only in English. Since previous studies have shown that appropriate use of L1 is valuable and effective (Levine, 2003), it makes sense to use Japanese effectively and purposefully in limited cases. However, to create an input-rich learning environment the base language must definitely be English**.** Clément et al. (2003) showed that learners' willingness to communicate in L2 is influenced by the frequency and quality of L2 contact. Teachers have to give students as much high quality input as possible by conducting the class mainly in English. Ideally, every teacher should be proficient enough to conduct meaningful classes entirely in English, yet should also learn when and how to use Japanese to create more effective lessons.

## Providing plentiful output opportunities

### *CLT and TBL*

Providing opportunities for input cannot, on its own, lead students to acquisition of new language. Learners also have to be encouraged to produce output. How can this be achieved? As emphasis in English teaching both in junior and senior high schools has been moving toward communication, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-based Language Learning (TBL) have been gaining our attention. However, in these communication-oriented approaches, questions such as "with whom?" and "for what?" can arise in this Japanese EFL learning environment. While CLT and TBL can be effective in improving motivation and helping students develop true fluency in an L2 by putting them in a real English situation (Dekeyser, 1998), we can easily find a huge mismatch between CLT or TBL and the actual learning situation in Japan. For example:

- CLT and TBL are of Anglo-American origin and can conflict with a Confucian-heritage culture in which teachers are supposed to have authority over students (Hu, 2005).
- In TBL, as learners are allowed to choose the language needed to achieve the outcome of the task and are given freedom to decide which grammatical items to use (Ellis, 2003), they may not produce the target items in an activity.
- Teaching in TBL is not designed with examinations in mind (Wills and Willis, 2007).
- In the TBL-based classroom, it is better to give all the classroom instructions in English to provide a clear link between the classroom and the real world (Willis & Willis, 2007), but many Japanese teachers are not using English as the sole, or even main, tool for communication in their classes.

Careful examination of the meaning of English learning in the Japanese context indicates that CLT and TBL are not yet as suitable as we would expect in encouraging Japanese EFL learners to produce output in the classroom. The effect of tasks, of course, must not be dismissed since they can improve learners' motivation and help them to develop true fluency in an L2 (Dekeyser, 1998). We can use tasks effectively if they are attuned to the purpose of the class.

### *PPP*

Anderson (1993) claims in his acquisition theory that language learning starts out in declarative form, progresses to the stage of proceduralization through extensive practice, and then knowledge becomes automatic. Drawing on this theory, Sharwood Smith (1981) and DeKeyser (1998) argue that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge through extensive practice. This posi-

tion supports the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) approach, which starts with explicit explanation of specific new forms and meanings, followed by practice focusing mainly on accuracy, and finally moving to the production stage in which "learners would be required to produce language more spontaneously, based on meanings the learner himself or herself would want to express" (Skehan, 1998, p.93).

This PPP approach has been roundly dismissed by proponents of CLT and TBL. For example, Willis (2004) mentions that language learning is a complex process that does not proceed in a linear additive way. Skehan (1998) states that "such an approach is now out of fashion" (p.94) and White (1988) discredits the PPP approach as a meaning-impoverished methodology.

However, this traditional approach, which is still often seen in Japanese EFL classrooms, can still be justified. In his learning model (Figure 1), Saito (1998) utilizes drill activities, which would be dismissed in TBL, and argues for the crucial role of the remedial phase which allows learners to move back to the previous stage when they cannot successfully perform in the current stage. The sequence of the model is more compatible with a PPP approach than with TBL. This model is convincing as it is based on Saito's extensive teaching experience in the Japanese classroom.

Activities which are not regarded as crucial in CLT or TBL, such as imitation, repetition, pattern practice, drills, and memorization are in fact necessary in most Japanese English classes. Yamaoka (2006) argues that imitation, repetition, and pattern practice are essential for English learning in the input-scarce Japanese EFL environment. In addition, Ding (2007) reports the crucial roles of text memorization and imitation in the success of Chinese learners of English whose EFL learning environment is identical to the Japanese one.

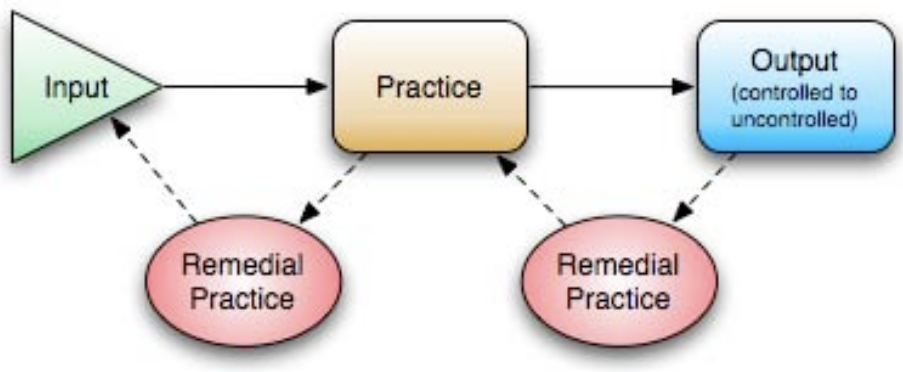


**Figure 1. Learning model**

## Conclusion

As English teaching and learning has been shifting to a more communicative approach, CLT and TBL have been attracting more attention. However, these Western approaches, which do not take sufficient account of the unique English learning environment in Japan, are not yet as practical in application as the PPP approach.

Many teaching approaches and methods, most of which are of Anglo-American or European origin, have been imported. We have seen fads in teaching methods come and go. SLA research has been providing suggestions for more effective teaching and now even brain science is beginning to enter into the area of English education. In this chaotic situation with an overload of information, including some attractive-sounding ideas that may not be suited to the local context, some may be easily confused about how they should teach English.

However, teachers' own beliefs rooted in their own learning and teaching experience in this Japanese EFL context should be the base for teaching. Firm beliefs, established through struggling with English learning (teaching), will lead instructors in the right direction. Of course, they can refer to Western methods or research implications, but the final decision should be left to well-qualified, competent teachers. Teachers, who have worked hard to acquire learning and teaching experience to improve the quality of their English classes, must decide what and how to teach their students.

As was mentioned earlier, learners can have dual goals, namely, a practical, realistic goal related to tests or grades, and a goal related to using English for international or intercultural communication, and they may attach a greater or lesser degree of importance to each of these (Yashima, 2000). It seems that most learners have the former type of motivation (related to tests) more than the latter (related to communication) in the Japanese EFL situation (Yashima et al, 2004). However, whatever goals they have, teachers can do a lot to enhance students' intrinsic motivation (Ellis, 2005). Dörnyei (2001) states that the best way to improve students' motivation is to improve the quality of teaching. Giving careful consideration to Japanese students' unique learning en-

vironment without being influenced too easily by attractive, supposedly effective methods or flavor of the month teaching systems, teachers have to conduct genuinely effective English classes.

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