Point to Point

Some Comments on "Team-Teaching in Japan: The Koto-Ku Project"

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1. Introduction

In his paper, "Team-Teaching In Japan: The Koto-Ku Project," (*JALT Journal* 11[1], pp. 68-77), Peter Sturman has presented a clear picture of both the Koto-ku Project and some of the problems faced by teachers in team teaching situations in Japan. I would agree that the project represents a successful example of a program which is "quite different to most situations in Japan" (p. 69). However, because of its uniqueness, it is important to point out to teachers not familiar with the various "native speaker in the classroom" (NSIC) programs throughout Japan that some elements which have proven successful in the Koto-ku Project may not necessarily be appropriate or transferable to other projects. This paper, based on my two and one-half years experience teaching in a junior high school NSIC program in Tokyo, will point out three areas of difference—organization and aims, teaching, and measurement of "success"—between the Koto-ku Project and the "one-shot," where students and native-speaker teachers (NSTs) see each other only one time. Additionally, it will question some of Sturman's suggestions for the roles of native speaker teachers and Japanese teachers (JTs).

2. Organization and Aims

The principal organizational difference between the Koto-ku Project and the one-shot is the frequency and regularity of class meetings. The Koto-ku Project, in contrast to the one-shot, is

organized around regularly scheduled classes. Its lessons are "conducted in a series of stages" (p. 72), a teaching strategy made possible by that program's built-in continuity. On the other hand, students in a one-shot program undergo what might best be described as a "language experience" rather than a lesson. Thus, each program's organization has a major impact on what is done in the classroom. Although the aims of the two programs do not differ in content, their relative importance is different. The first two aims of the Koto-ku Project are to "improve students' spoken English" and to "instill greater confidence in listening and speaking" (p. 69). However, the principal goal of the one-shot program is to motivate students in their study of English. This is done in two ways.

First, every aspect of a one-shot lesson is focused on students' enjoyment of their language experience because, if classes are enjoyable, "students will use English simply to do the task successfully" (Hoskins, 1986, p. 28).

The second way of generating motivation is by making the experience **unique**. The one-shot accomplishes this by creating an atypical classroom environment, not only through the presence of an NST and the observable interaction between him or her and the JT, but also from the novelty of a lesson focused on communicating in the target language. As Hayashi states, "during classes with a native speaker the 'English for entrance exams' attitude should be cast aside. . ." (1987). Although the JT's willingness to "cast aside" varies from teacher to teacher, for the most part I found them more than eager to create such an experience for their students.

3. Teaching

There are also significant differences in the teaching of the two projects, especially in the areas of lesson content and measurement of success.

3.1 Lesson content

According to Sturman, the teaching in the Koto-ku Project focuses on "practical" lessons which are based on a Monbusho-approved textbook (pp. 70-71). Thus, lessons are based on a "top down" approach and reflect a decision by "higher-ups" as to the

needs of "typical" first-year junior high school students. Although one-shot lessons are practical in the sense that they too reflect a careful selection of familiar vocabulary and grammatical structures, they differ in approach to the lesson, as well as in content. Because one-shot teachers are not restricted to a textbook containing a series of "approved" activities, they have a great deal of flexibility in tailoring lessons to the needs of individual classes. As a result, one-shot lessons reflect a "bottom up" approach, with their content based on carefully selected communicative-based materials.

More specifically, lessons in a one-shot class are generally based on a combination of language games, activities involving NST/ individual student interaction, and music. Although language games are sometimes dismissed as simply "entertainment" because they are not integrated into the normal curriculum (Smith, 1988), they provide an excellent medium for achieving the one-shot's goal. Games may be old "standards," such as hangman, or original creations developed by the JTs especially for their students. Language games, both new and old, provide excellent opportunities for communicative language use among students, as well as between teachers and students.

In activities where NST/student interaction is the goal, students may individually ask questions they have prepared concerning the NST's life, or the NST and students may introduce themselves to each other and shake hands. To students who have never even spoken to a non-Japanese—much less touched one!—this opportunity provides a memorable as well as entertaining introduction to western culture.

Music, the third activity, is also an essential part of an entertaining language experience. In planning the lesson, the music that students know and like is discussed and at least one such activity that reflects either their "repertoire" or their interest is selected. Students may perform a song prepared for their annual choral contest, sing a Beatles' song, or learn a new song. Whether the students perform a familiar song or learn a new one, "singing is certainly one of the activities which generates the greatest enthusiasm" (Papa & Iantorno, 1979), and enthusiasm is a basic ingredient of enjoyment.

3.2 *Measurement of Success*

Finally, the success of both projects can only be evaluated in terms of their stated aims. The first aim of the Koto-ku Project, "to improve students' spoken English" (p. 69), is a measurable one so students in the Koto-ku Project are tested and their test results are examined and compared. On the other hand, the "motivation to further study" goal of the one-shot program is unmeasurable by any standard gauge. It can only be assumed that students' enjoyment of the experience carries over into their language study. However, the following student comment (translated from Japanese) may best reflect the success of the one-shot: "Today's class was the first time for me to speak to a native speaker and I was very anxious. It was interesting. At the beginning I thought one hour was very long but afterwards I thought it was very short. Someday I want to have such a lesson again."

4. The Roles of NST and JT

At one point in his article, Sturman ventures out of his area of expertise and makes several suggestions for classes "where students only see an NST once or twice" (p. 73). In this section he states three reasons why the NST should not dominate these one-shot lessons; however, I will argue that NSTs should dominate them.

Sturman's first point is that "it is important that the students respect their JT, and therefore the relationship between the JT and NST in the classroom must show the students that both teachers are equally responsible and capable" (p. 74). I would agree that respect and the determination of responsibilities are two crucial factors in a team teaching situation. However, my definition of each differs from Sturman's. First, student respect for the JT is the result of an on-going relationship, not a seventy-minute, one-time language experience. And second, although both the JT and the NST are equally responsible for the success of a class, the JT's area of responsibility lies principally outside the one-shot class because the JT alone prepares students for the experience by screening the questions they have prepared for the NST, by giving them opportunities to practice asking those questions, by working with them in practicing activities in which they are directly involved, and by

giving them a "cultural preview" of a lesson with an NST. On the other hand, although both the NST and the JT share the responsibility for determining the content of the language experience, the NST's role **during** the one-shot is in some ways similar to that of an entertainer. As Ferguson states, "a quality class given to a student who comes to enjoy himself is given by a quality teacher-entertainer" (Hoskins, 1986, p. 28). Thus, if students bring with them the expectation of "let's have fun," an idea fostered by the JT, it is then the principal responsibility of the NST to fulfill that expectation.

Sturman's second point is that "it is valuable that the students believe their JT's English is good, so both teachers should be equally responsible for pronunciation drilling" (p. 74). I would argue that, for two reasons, this statement is invalid. First, students who are taught by a JT who uses English as the medium of instruction rather than a basis for translation will respect their JT's English ability, with or without the further corroboration of one-to-one NST/JT interaction. Second, there are some JTs who do not have the linguistic competence to converse with the NST, particularly in front of a class of 40+ students. In those instances, silently handing a piece of paper to the JT about a pronunciation problem, as Sturman suggests (p. 74), is not the solution to the basic problem.

Sturman's third point is that

it is essential that the JTs be fully aware of the purpose of and procedure for any language exercise so that she or he can be equally responsible for initiation and explanation of listening and speaking exercises, pairwork, groupwork, and open class exercises. (74)

Although I agree with Sturman's point regarding equal responsibility for purpose and procedure, I would point out that pairwork and groupwork are rarely appropriate in a one-shot, unless students are already familiar with this type of configuration.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, both the Koto-ku Project and the one-shot represent successful examples of native speaker in the classroom pro-

> Among the most common errors that these [deaf] individuals make is the recurrent use of patterns that do not correspond with the inflectional morphology (e.g., in verb tense and agreement), the misuse of function words (e.g., articles and prepositions), and various other errors (e.g., incorrect subcategorizations, inappropriate use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions, and/or anomalies in constitutent structure). (p. 6)

The fact that similar linguistic deviations commonly occur in these three distinctly different types of learners suggests that genetic coding of the human mind may exert a powerful control over this set of learning behaviors. Some would use this evidence to argue that linguistic universals play an intrinsic role in the development of language acquisition in humans.

The "natural order" of learning as outlined by Krashen (1981) and discussed in depth by Chomsky in his Managua Lectures (1988) is very much to the point here. Krashen, of course, holds that acquisition of language is a manifestation of an internalized syllabus "without substantial interruption or contribution from the conscious grammar" (1981, p. 52). Chomsky also supports this view:

> In the case of language there is a special faculty that is a central element of the human mind. It operates quickly, in a deterministic fashion, unconsciously and beyond the limits of awareness and in a manner that is common to the species, yielding a rich and complex system of knowledge, a particular language. (1988, p. 157)

This discussion seems to have taken us very far from language learning and deafness, yet the theoretical implications noted above are as relevant to those with hearing loss as they are for other populations of language learners—including the mentally handicapped (Berry, 1976), ESL students (Collier, 1987; Kellerman & Smith, 1986; Pica, 1984), and children within pidgin or creole cultures (Lehiste, 1988; Romaine, 1988).

The lesson to be learned here is that in spite of limited input and other types of interference, human beings acquire language simply because language acquisition is an intrinsic feature of our genetic programming.