TEACHING AS COMMUNICATION: AN EMPIRICAL APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENGLISH TEACHING METHODOLOGY FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY.

LANGUAGE AS COMMUNICATION*

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CHAPTER I

In this section university language teaching will be examined more closely showing it to be at odds with current thinking on EFL pedagogy. It will be argued that a communicative approach has become necessary in order to motivate students to take their studies more seriously, but until reforms putting more emphasis on oral English training have been firmly put in place prior to university entrance there can be no prospect of significantly raising the standard of spoken English at universities. In the meantime, a communicative approach should utilize English writing skills for a radical methodology, content-based and homework-rather than exam-driven, which is the sine qua non for raising the low intellectual level of English language studies.

While Japanese staff mostly prefer to lecture, foreigners usually teach most English conversation classes since, “native speakers” are thought to be more “qualified” to teach “English conversation” (Eikaiwa) classes. Few Japanese feel comfortable conversing in English and Eikaiwa is regarded as intellectually undemanding, or even beneath their dignity.

The foreign teacher must attempt to teach English within an education system that differs from its western counterparts in the intellectual demands it requires of students; as many commentators have remarked, the Japanese university plays a different, “hidden” role in Japanese society (see Kelly in Wadden, 1993:172-187), and it is here, starting from an understanding of the students’ situation and their own expectations, that the first foundation stone of a communicative pedagogy must be laid.

CHAPTER II

Since English is taught in schools only as an examination subject, most students

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students studying to obtain grades to enter a ‘good’ university as graduation from a prestigious university is considered a prerequisite for employment with a big company or government. Once assured a university place, students need not worry about grades since employers are unconcerned. Students at less prestigious institutions, too, feel a certain resignation knowing that grades will not affect their employment prospects. In stark contrast to their diligence prior to university, undergraduates lack all incentives to excel, especially since teachers are reluctant to fail them. The lesson-based tests of highschool become lecture-based tests at university still emphasizing rote memorization, contributing further to the undermining of student motivation.

Such is the situation at Japanese universities acknowledged in the main English language publication on teaching in Japan, *The Language Teacher*, and is also confirmed by my own experience working with text-book based methodologies and regular examinations. One remedy for this ineffective system is suggested by the findings of teachers in Japan and elsewhere (see Wadden, 1993; Short, 1993) which indicate a shift away from grammar-translation to a content-based approach, echoed by the 1992 Monbusho guidelines for the teaching of English so that in the future language study may be linked to a particular discipline, ie., English for Special Purposes (ESP).

Any pedagogical approach which breaks with the traditional oppressive and infantilizing “banking” model of teaching (see Freire, 1988:57-74) characterized by the word *oshiekoma* ie., to teach by stuffing heads, is welcomed by many students who find a communicative classroom where they are exposed to exciting or stimulating texts a fresh and fun experience, once they have overcome their initial shock of exposure to the unfamiliar materials and teaching/learning methods (see Miller,1995)

Modifying the framework within which learning takes place is possible (see Wadden 1993), but only by first dismantling structural impediments to student motivation, can curricula relevant to students’ needs be realized. Thus replacing exams with a system of student self-evaluation is strongly indicated as the foundation stone of a progressive pedagogy that recognizes intrinsic motivation to be the sine qua non of a deep approach to successful learning (Hidi, 1990; Schiefele, 1991), in contrast to the extrinsic motivation of pre-university students associated with a surface approach.

Removing the fear of exams (giving students more time to prepare for the battery of tests to be taken in the numerous other courses they must attend) would signal a shift away from the teacher’s authoritarian power to confer grades and places the onus on students to take responsibility for performance and pride in achievement; this has important psychological ramifications in fostering initiative and autonomous study which Japanese students, used to spoon-feeding methods of instruction, seem to lack (see Robb in Wadden, 1993: 120-5). By eliminating grading and classification based on pseudo-objective or arbitrary criteria in favor of the warmer, subjective process of negotiation between teacher and student based on a portfolio assessment, teacher and students can better concentrate on teaching and learning.

Since classes for non-majors are usually large (40-60 students), their impersonal atmosphere and the widely differing language proficiency of the students are serious
obstacles to objective student evaluation; arranging an individual interview with each
student in order to negotiate the final grade is a more reasonable option.

Much has been written on the testing of language proficiency (Harris, 1969; Madsen,
1983; Weir, 1990) whether for global proficiency or simply classroom testing, and for
the latter in particular, many methods have been devised by teachers to monitor
students' progress and award grades (see Wadden, 1993: 126-34). However, a once-
weekly 90 minute lesson can be of little use in preparing students for global proficiency.
Questioning the practice of testing for class grades may be more controversial but I
believe that testing holds few advantages for deep learning and many disadvantages
such as the reinforcement of rote memorization, the distraction of attention from the
joys of learning caused by exam anxiety, not to mention the consumption of class
time (see Smith, 1986); thirty sessions a year are hardly sufficient for a satisfactory
learning outcome, reason enough to replace the time-consuming ritual of roll-call
(important only if mere attendance can earn a credit) with other ways of monitoring
student participation to save lesson time and discourage the rewarding of bench-
warming. The futility of traditional methods of evaluation can be surmised from the

As an alternative to exams this thesis proposes a homework system of written
reports serving to record a student's effort, and as a criterion for evaluating overall
performance. Positive participation in the classroom must be given due consideration
but for monitoring student performance there is no need for elaborate systems of
regular testing which often appeal more to the teacher's needs (ie. filling in time,
busywork etc.) rather than fulfill students' educational needs. How to evaluate student
classroom 'participation' is further complicated by cultural factor ie., the Japanese
notion of 'positive' participation differing from the western concept (see Anderson in
Wadden, 1993: 101-10; Miller, 1995). Classroom performance is perhaps best left to
the judgement of the students themselves who, in the experience of the present writer,
tend, if anything, to be rather overcritical of themselves (see T.L.Simmons, 1996:
11-26).

Since the grading system at Japanese universities classifies student credits into three
groups (A,B,C) there can be no argument about its imprecise character ie., a
norm-referenced evaluation, grading student performance in terms of how well the
student compares to classroom peers, rather than a criterion-referenced evaluation
which grades student performance in terms of how well the student meets pre-set
standards (this would result in many students flunking out). It must therefore be
asked: should class time and student/teacher energy be expended on testing and
exams; for what pedagogical purpose? Since grades carry no weight with employers,
they have only a negative reinforcement value negligible as an incentive to study.

There is no improvement in language proficiency which would justify the emphasis
placed on testing, especially in the case of non-majors. Many testing methods currently
employed would earn the censure of Alexander who warns that "The washback effect
of such testing on materials and methods where the techniques used to test a language
are conflated with the methods necessary to teach one can only be described as pernicious" (Alatis et al., 1981:253). Instead, teachers should look for other ways to motivate students and monitor their progress: teaching methods and texts that encourage intrinsic motivation and incorporate communicative goals. Accordingly, the first principle of a communicative approach should offer curricula and teaching methods that differ from the authoritarian highschool model; replacing exams with student self-evaluation, subject to the teacher's scrutiny and discretion, creates from the start a more productive and communicative learning atmosphere.

While student self-evaluation is an innovative idea, student evaluation of teachers is slowly coming to universities. Reflection/review journals are a good way to open a channel of communication; such a dialog should be welcomed by all teachers as an important tool for self-reflection, and as a useful means of fine-tuning the curriculum and improving teachers’ classroom performance (Bray and Harsch, 1996).

One objection to self-evaluation is that students tend to rate themselves higher than their academic performance would warrant, while studies conducted in the US and UK indicate that peer evaluation correlates more closely to the teachers' grading (Bligh et al., 1981:50). Japanese students, however, are raised to be modest and self-deprecating, so it is not uncommon for students (especially women) to undervalue their academic performance; in a society still harboring remnants of patriarchal or semi-feudalistic male attitudes (expressed in the Japanese proverb danson johi—look up to men, look down on women), male students appear to fear ridicule from the women, whereas the latter avoid standing out in class lest they be seen as haughty. Peer evaluation would present difficulties in a society where expressing opinions in not the rule, and criticizing and evaluating others is frowned on.

The chief merit of student self-evaluation, based on my observations, is that, when treated as adults, students are more likely to take their studies more seriously. Abolishing exams, therefore, is no mere teachnicality but has the pedagogical purpose of attracting students, motivating them to take pride in the completion of their assignments and to take responsibility for their overall academic performance. By replacing exams with written homework assignments the teacher can wean students away from the spoon-feeding methods of exam-based pedagogy, and coax more effort from them outside the classroom, thus encouraging autonomous study habits.

CHAPTER III

The compulsory two years of English is a burden students bear with traditional stoicism since the goal is simply to obtain the necessary credits for graduation. This reality must be the starting point of any honest assessment of the learning situation and reconstruction of the curriculum. To pretend otherwise is to build classrooms in the air with no existence outside the scholarly paper; the present education crisis in Japan with its interminable debates and spurious claims of 'success' in devising the
'ultimate' methodology, confirms ipso facto the failure of wishful thinking (see Pica, 1996).

Before the question of methodology is taken up, the fundamental reality to be considered is one that few educators dare pose, and that even fewer are willing to answer honestly: can students acquire a degree of fluency or at least proficiency in speaking English, as EFL theory and the communicative approach promise? Can spoken English be learned in the Japanese university? The honest answer based on the empirical evidence of many years classroom experience, and conversations with colleagues and students, is a qualified no for the majority of learners, including English majors themselves (see Nunn, 1996).

The literature also supports a negative conclusion when the conditions for language learning proposed in various models are measured against those obtaining in Japanese classes: Stern (1983) considers the problem of language learning from the point of view of language pedagogy while Spolsky in Conditions for Second Language Learning (1989) attempts a comprehensive survey of second language acquisition.

Stern cites Mackey (39-41) and Strevens (41-45) who emphasize the socio-political context of language learning, the sociolinguistic and sociocultural influences of the environment. Mackey indicates how the teaching variables as well as the learning variables are dependent upon political, social, and educational factors, and as this paper is attempting to adduce, the macrofactors at work in Japanese society appear to have had a singularly negative influence on foreign language learning, especially at the highschool level, the latter system being perhaps the greatest contributing factor to the English education crisis in the Japanese university system today.

Spolsky's "preference model" (1989) which Ellis calls "the most substantial attempt to construct a comprehensive theory" (1994: 679), is a general theory that includes 74 conditions for language learning, claimed by Spolsky to be "the natural and logical conclusion of current research in second language learning," and to "form a statement of the 'state of the art'" (1989: 16). In his schematic outline (1989: 28) Spolsky groups the various conditions starting with the macrofactor Social Context which leads to Attitudes (of various kinds) which appear in the learner as Motivation which joins with other personal characteristics such as Age; Personality; Capabilities; Previous Knowledge, all of which explain the use the learner makes of the available Learning Opportunities (formal or informal), following from which the interplay between learner and situation determines Linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes for the learner; at the same time Social Context also provides Learning Opportunities. Strictly speaking the Spolsky study concerns ESL but it is generally recognized that there is some theoretical overlap, from the point of view of pedagogy, with EFL. For the learner there are significant differences, but as a rule it is clear that university students studying L2 in an L1 environment are comparatively disadvantaged.

Ellis (1994: 679-80) points out that this model, on account of its comprehensiveness, has a number of drawbacks, the most serious being that "the interrelationships among the different sets of statements (ie. the components of the model) are underspecified".
However, Spolsky’s general theory is, in Ellis’s words:

attractive to SLA research because it affords a basis for systematic enquiry. It
provides a framework in which individual researchers can locate their specific lines
of enquiry, it allows for specific predictions based on the conditions to be tested,
and it provides a blueprint for investigating the whole of L2 acquisition (ie. for
determining which factors contribute to the universal and variant properties of L2
acquisition and to what extent they do so). In other words it helps to shape the
whole field and caters for research with both micro and macro goals (loc. cit.)
Allowing for the theory’s high level of generality it is interesting to use Spolsky’s
model as a grid against which to measure the conditions of language learning in Japan.

Spolsky’s “underspecified mathematical formula” gives a convenient overview (15):
Kf+Kp+A+M+O where Kf represents “knowledge and skills at some future time”,
and “is a result of four groups of factors: Kp (knowledge and skills at the moment
...), A (...various components of ability, including physiological, biological, intellectual,
and cognitive skills, M (...various affective factors such as personality, attitudes,
motivation, and anxiety), and O (...opportunity for learning the language consisting
of time multiplied by kind, the latter covering the range of formal and informal
situations in which the learner is exposed to language)”. The formula is “a claim
that each of the parts will make a difference to the result : if any one is absent, there
can be no learning, and the greater any one is, the greater the amount of learning”.

As Spolsky admits, the “initial simplicity ... invites the elaboration that will
capture the complexity of the phenomenon being studied”, which is what this paper
is attempting to do by highlighting the problems of teaching English to non-majors
before proposing ways to maximize the value of Kf as far as the macrofactors will
allow. In this regard Spolsky’s comments on the applicability of his formula to the
micro-level as well as to the macro-level are noteworthy; speaking of M he adds:

Thus, whereas the conditions making up M in developing a general proficiencies have
a strong enough effect to vary according to the kind and as strength of mot
ivation,M in learning a single item is more likely to be a single measure of
willingness to persist in the effort of understand, memorize or practise the item.
It is here that one might look for the connection between microlevel and macrolevel
(16).

When one considers the values of M and O as they pertain to non-majors it is
difficult to avoid concluding (with some qualifications) that, according to Spolsky’s
formula, “there can be no learning”. The unfavorable macro values of O and the
degree to which they impact on the M of non-majors appear to be fatal to the
teaching enterprise, but teachers have no choice but to continue devising teaching
strategies. While attempting to raise the micro value M is the most feasible strategy
for a communicative approach to teaching English, acknowledging the poor social
context for language learning is the starting point for a realistic pedagogy.

While a pessimistic prognosis is warranted for competency and fluency in the spoken
language, there is a better outlook for listening comprehension, reading ability, writing, and most importantly, cognitive and emotional development since any enhancement of analytical powers, intuition, aesthetic appreciation can lead to a love of learning, surely the ideal learning outcome for any teacher. Positive learning outcomes are possible, if teachers can increase the micro value M by creating favorable conditions for learning in the classroom. Thus using such non-communicative methods as “This is a pen etc.” will lower student motivation; students are already past the age when boring drills and dull textbooks can hold their attention and interest. With large classes of 40 students meeting once a week even motivated students find it difficult to maintain their enthusiasm in conditions so unfavorable to acquiring spoken English.

CHAPTER IV

An obstacle to classroom discourse is the cultural conditioning of Japanese students who are reluctant to assert themselves in public or to express opinions (Matsumoto, 1996). The Japanese proverb *deru kugi wa utareru* - the nail that sticks up gets knocked down - is always quoted as if to explain this frequently observed behavior of Japanese that foreigners find the most frustrating cultural barrier to communication (see Fred E. Anderson in Wadden, 1993; Nunn, 1996; McVeigh, 1997)

Macrofactors such as the ratio of students to teachers and the number of contact hours also act as severe constraints on the effectiveness of teachers (Glass et al., 1982) while even the topography of classrooms with bolted-down seats facing the front of the room where the teacher is supposed to stand and lecture does not favor a flexible and relaxed non-traditional/non-authoritarian approach to teaching.

Methodology and teacher competency when weighed against such unfavorable conditions seem redundant, but sound pedagogic principles and a realistic assessment of what can be achieved within the institutional constraints of the university can help circumvent some of the impediments to language learning beyond the teacher’s control. Still, it is sobering for education theorists (classroom teachers already know from their hands-on experience) to ponder the words of Noam Chomsky (1988):

I think people who are involved in education ought to be cautious about applying linguistics. They really have to ask what works, and it’s not at all clear the kinds of insights that are now obtainable about language are very helpful for, say, language teaching. In fact, my own feeling is, probably not. I used to be a language teacher for children and also for college students. My feeling always was that ninety-nine percent of the problem was doing something interesting and one percent of the problem was how you did it; all the discoveries that may be made about that one percent really aren’t going to change anything. You have to make the language learners want to learn and if they do they’ll learn no matter how bad your system is. If they don’t, they won’t learn no matter how good your system is (274)
Maximizing the potential of that slim one percent Chomsky concedes to methodology, and selecting appropriate teaching materials is essential, but teachers surveying the literature written about the ‘feeder’ disciplines for language pedagogy such as applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA), ESL/EFL theory, psychology and sociology must not overestimate the efficacy of “method” concepts (Allwright, 1988). As Pennycook warns there is “little evidence that methods ever reflected classroom reality” (1989:602). Prabhu, proposing four components of language pedagogy, points out, the “ideational” component that subsumes the formation of mental images, conceptual models or theories about some phenomenon is “not merely a site for theories developed in linguistics, psychology of sociology, but is at most... a ‘sympathetic response’ to theories in those disciplines, and I believe the basis of the sympathetic response lies in pedagogic experience and reflection, ...” (Cook/Seidlhofer, 199t:60).

Discussing the second operational component that concerns the practical decisions and actions involved in teaching that “relate to, and interact with, the ideational component” Prabhu echoes both Chomsky Spolsky in referring to the learner’s “incidental encounter with language expressions ” which may provide “a favourable condition for rule creation ... or reception and storage of the expressions themselves in memory.” and confesses that, “it is even more difficult ... to capture evidence of learning in some objective way, and to establish cause-effect relationships between specific teaching activities and specific learning outcomes.” (my emphasis)

The reason for the difficulty in establishing an objective correlation between teaching strategies and learning outcomes that has given rise to the Babel of theories concerning ESL/EFL, is, according to Prabhu:

...because of a fundamental difference between teaching and learning: teaching is a physical activity which can be planned, observed, and controlled, as it takes place, in some explicit objective way; learning is a mental process which cannot be observed, controlled, or even detected, as it takes place, in any objective way. It is therefore quite unreasonable to expect to establish explicit, objective correspondences, either between concepts of the learning process and types of teaching activity, or between types of teaching activity and the actual process of learning ... we need to ask what other modes might be available in pedagogy for interrelating concepts of learning and types of classroom activity (62).

Answers must be found in the empirical reality of the classroom experience since, as Prabhu stresses, teachers not only carry out their lesson plans but also interact with learners, communicating in “overt and covert ways, by both verbal and non-verbal means” (63). The teacher is in touch with the learning process, the development of the teacher’s feeling for learning forming the basis of classroom experience. The intuitive sense constantly interacts with the ideational component of pedagogy, “thus selecting, rejecting, or reshaping the concepts concerned” (64). The key term for teachers creatively engaged in the act of teaching and sensitive to the learning process is their sense of “plausibility” which he defines as “the ideation of the
learning process, resulting from an interaction with his or her feel for learning, ... representing what he or she ‘believes’, or most identifies with, at that time; ... teaching can be of value only when the teacher’s sense of plausibility is active and engaged” (64). Thus, only a teacher who can develop a feel for the learning process and maintain it “through its interaction with ideation” (ie. teaching with a sense of plausibility) can expect to enhance student learning. Concluding his outline of the ideational and operational components of language pedagogy Prabhu suggests that:

learning outcomes depend on an active engagement of the teacher’s sense of plausibility, rather than on the actual content of the ideation involved - that is to say, that it does not really matter which particular ideation or theory of learning guides the teaching, as long as that particular theory is in fact what constitutes the teacher’s sense of plausibility at that time. The value of an ideation does not lie in its in its intrinsic truth, whatever that may mean, but in its ability to interact productively with a given teacher’s classroom experience and to help develop and keep alive his or her sense of plausibility (65).

This argument underlines the need for a continual engagement with theory from feeder disciplines as a source of stimulation for the intellect and intuition while denying the direct applicability of raw theory unless appropriate for classroom contingencies, which in the socio-cultural context of Japan means that the efficacy of communicative methods is severely limited (Nunn, 1996). Prabhu’s concluding remarks also indicate how teachers according to their personality, upbringing and system of values must individually appropriate ideational concepts that appeal to, and can be integrated into their sense of plausibility. Hence the multiplicity of theories and the proliferation of methodologies characterizing SLA and applied linguistics research today with little prospect of any one theory attaining dominance (unlike the hard sciences) since as Ellis (1994: 686) remarks, “those theories that are found useful by researchers and practioners (such as teachers) for their valying purposes will continue to flourish.”

Also cautioning against indiscriminate application of theories from feeder disciplines, in particular from linguistics and SLA, to language pedagogy (for a summary of current opinion on the relationship between SLA research and pedagogy see Ellis: 686-91). Widdowson (cited in Ellis) states that, since theorizing, research and teaching involve different procedures, the direct application of research is impossible but believes that, “outsider research” and “insider research” (ie. classroom teaching) need to find a point of mediation which he suggests can come from “teacher education” rather than “teacher training”. Lightbown, on the other hand (also cited in Ellis), provocatively concludes: “second-language acquisition research does not tell teachers what to teach, and what it says about how to teach they have already figured out”. Their differing positions echoing Prabhu and Chomsky, should not deter teachers from keeping abreast of theoretical developments in order to nourish that vital sense of plausibility.

The ideological component in Prabhu’s model belongs to pedagogic conduct and
practice, an aspect of education that often causes discomfort and embarrassment; Prabhu considers ideology to lie at the heart of the teaching process, defining it as "involving the pursuit of an ideal - a desire to change, maintain, or resist, the order of the world, in some way, through the practice of pedagogy" (65).

Language as communication involves exchanging meaning and subjective values about the world outside of the classroom. Since language teaching must have a subject of discourse, it cannot be ideology-free. The fast growing trend of content-based language teaching has brought the issue of ideology into the open, exposing the fact that teachers are not immune to ideological influences. Social context and the institutional setting of the teaching process significantly influence not only what is taught, i.e., the selection of materials, but also how pedagogic practice is conceived and carried out i.e., the multiplicity of theories and methodologies.

The final, "managerial" component of Prabhu’s model, refers to the practical decision-making in planning and carrying out the lesson. As the most complex component it actually subsumes the other three and is the one which is most impinged upon by the social context i.e., the expectations of the institution and the learners, the budget and resources available, ideological constraints; it also constitutes the area where theories and concepts must cede to the contingencies of the given educational situation, so that an unavoidable 'con-fusion' occurs in the assessment of "method" owing to the convergence of the operational into the orbit of the managerial. Thus:

This may well be a major reason (apart from the problem of objectivity noted earlier) why method-assessment and method-comparison studies seldom yield clear results and why one can seldom find a method being implemented in classrooms in its 'pure' (ideational-operational) form (69-70).

The cogency of the above argument is clearly illustrated by the fact that, despite the freedom to plan a syllabus (see Wordell in Wadden, 1993) using a wide variety of teaching materials: textbooks, newspapers and magazines, comics, advertizing, plays, pulp fiction, bellettristic literature, films and music to teach topics ranging from ordering a hamburger ("survival" skills) to torture in prisons (human rights), severe constraints emanating from the 'managerial' component (the special character of the Japanese university impacting on student study habits), impose limits and restrictions on what and how to teach, narrowing down a teacher’s choices to an uncomfortable degree if the spoken language is the main goal of the learning outcome. This would mean, in effect, giving up any idea of incorporating the kind of intellectual content into the lesson that one traditionally associates with a university education since students lack vocabulary and mastery of the syntactical structures necessary for intellectual discourse. Focusing exclusively on spoken English risks trivializing the syllabus with a game-oriented approach whose lack of intellectual stimulation precludes a learning outcome either useful for practical communication, or appropriate for a university education; whole-task activities such as information-gap tasks, language games etc., as Nunan comments, "do not always stimulate enthusiastic learner participation, nor is their relevance to the real world always apparent" (1988:87).
Another drawback to this approach is the reliance on group learning (see Sotto, 1994: 162-3). Despite great claims made for it, it is difficult to monitor large numbers of students who often end up chatting in L1, as Prabhu warns (1987); students explain that it is difficult to speak English with each other, (Japanese are sensitive about looking foolish in front of others); paradoxically, the group-oriented Japanese do not seem able to work well together in the classroom because they are used to competition in the classroom and are more comfortable working alone (McVeigh: 79-80).

Thus the difficulty of assessing theories and methods of language pedagogy derives from the impossibility of prescribing a particular method, since what "works" depends on the classroom situation, and most decisions will depend on the character and experience of the teacher. The quality of intuition and subjective decision making (Prabhu's "plausibility") form the crucial core of teaching ability so that the choice of classroom methods ultimately depends on criteria that make teaching an art informed by alert intuition as much as by reason and logic.

CHAPTER V

Before proposing various ways of how language may be used as communication we should first consider the current thinking and practice concerning the teaching of English in Japan. Judging by articles in The Language Teacher and in the English language press, the trend may be characterized as "communicative language teaching", but since this term covers a wide range of methods it is, as suggested by Richards and Rogers (1986), "best considered as an approach rather than a method" (83).

Communicative language teaching only arrived in Japan around 1980 although in has enjoyed wide support for the last twenty five years. Pioneering theoretical works in this field were by Hymes in the US with On Communicative Competence (1971), a reaction to Chomskian structural linguistics, and by Halliday in the UK with Explorations in the Functions of Language (1973) which emphasized the semantic components of language, calling for the development of a "semantic network" in order to understand the relationship between grammatical form and meaning in social context; Hymes expanded on Chomsky's notion of "grammatical competence" by introducing socio-linguistic factors and stressing the importance of tacit cultural knowledge (competence) for the performance aspect of linguistic competence, thus shifting the focus of linguistics from form to use.

Widdowson (1978), making a clear distinction between "correctness" and "appropriacy" coined the dichotomy "usage and use", suggesting possible pedagogic applications for advances in "communicative" linguistic theory. The limitations of many textbooks with their drills and "situational presentations" were highlighted by his critique; he clearly distinguished between aspects of meaning such as signification which merely refers to grammatical usage; for example, the sentence "this is a pen" which is not in itself meaningless as a sentence yet does not "communicate" much and therefore
has little value (ie. it is difficult to imagine how one could use it.), the kind of meaning "which sentences assume when they are put to use for communicative purposes." (11) According to Widdowson, value can be further refined to distinguish between the potential value of a unit of language and its realization in actual use. In designing language teaching materials this distinction is helpful in the selection stage of language structures and words where items are selected that have the highest potential value: "those which can be realized to perform the kinds of acts of communication which the learner will have to deal with (13)."

Widdowson stresses that selection on the basic of frequency alone (as instances of usage) is inadequate for communication purposes since it does not relate to potential use. Since the early 1980's with the development of computational analysis a new input to language learning is becoming available via the lexical syllabus based on corpus research (over 20 million words of spoken and written English) which utilizes the power of the most frequent words in English. This lexical approach to language learning with its grounding in a rigorously objective research of the English language corpus appears to be a potentially valuable new tool for instruction, especially since vocabulary building is the greatest obstacle for Japanese learners (and it would seem to confirm and complement Widdowson's orientation towards use as the right direction for language pedagogy; see Willis, 1990; Lewis, 1993).

Whereas potential value constitutes the main criterion for the selection stage of the language teaching process, Widdowson identifies "realized value" as having to do with the stage of grading and presentation so that when grading by reference to use "the order in which the language items are arranged is intended to reflect their value in the particular kind of communication with which the course is concerned (14)."

However, as Widdowson admits, it is not easy to realize language items by presenting them in the classroom as instances of actual use since in most language courses "the ultimate communicative behavior of the students has not been clearly defined" (15). He emphasizes that it is unhelpful to view the aims of a language course in terms of the four skills for dealing with the words and structures of a language, but instead to consider the use of the language for communicative purposes. Thus:

... the potential value of the items we select and their realization as use through grading and presentation have to relate to particular areas of use. What we have to think of, in other words, are particular kinds of communication, particular ways of using the language, as a necessary preliminary to the preparation of the course we are to teach.

A common assumption among language teachers seems to be ... that the essential task is to teach a selection of words and structures, that is to say elements of usage, and that this alone will provide for communicative needs in which whatever area is of use is relevant to the learner at a more advanced stage. What I am suggesting is that we should think of an area (or areas) of use right from the beginning and base our selection, grading and presentation on that. Only in this
way, it seems to me, can we ensure that we are teaching language as communication and not as a stock of usage which may never be realized in actual use at all (loc. cit.).

What Widdowson warns against is exactly the way in which much English teaching seems to be carried out in Japan, where the language is generally taught as a codified system rather than as a communicational tool (Giesecke, 1980; ). Hence the approach proposed by this paper will attempt to define the "particular area of use" and the "particular kind of communication" i.e., a return to text appreciation and exegesis incorporating communicative methods and integrated skills.

Despite the predominant grammar-translation transmission methods of teaching English in L1 it is, nevertheless, indisputable that most teachers and students in Japan, agree at least on the desirability of teaching English using a "communicative" approach. It is commonly assumed by many Japanese unfamiliar with the nuances of the English word "communication" that "communicative teaching," "communicative competence" and other pedagogic uses of the word "communicative" mean simply to teach students to speak English; "communicative" has become a synonym for "oral" or "spoken".

This narrow definition may have contributed to a negative trend in communicative teaching i.e., placing too much emphasis on the transactional uses of language at the expense of the more creative interactional uses of language such as reading and analyzing by means of written and oral discourse imaginative texts (also visual artifacts: photographs, paintings, films, music etc.) where cognitive development and self-expression are given a central place in social interaction (McCarthy and Carter, 1994).

Listening comprehension, usually considered "passive", may also be "activated" and rendered communicative by using "jigsaw" listening activities with students helping each other by sharing information (Geddes and Sturtridge, 1979). Because of the affective element music lyrics used in cloze exercises are particularly effective.

A widespread student notion about "English for communication", is that speaking English should enable students to function smoothly as tourists so that they can confidently change money, order a meal, or ask directions to the toilet, situations in which students will most likely find themselves if they speak English outside the classroom. However, this approach reduces university to a "finishing school for young ladies". That most students can not imagine any other purpose for learning English ought to temper too idealistic notions of learner-centered pedagogy which in Japan at present has limited scope since students tend to be immature, with few ideas of what or how they want to study. Japanese attitudes to speaking English can be found in the concept of Eihaiwa (English conversation), ridiculed by Lumis in "Iedorogi to shite no Eihaiwa" (The Ideology of English Conversation: 1981) : the exchange of platitudes and pleasantries, or superficial observations and questions preclude any serious topic that might require serious thought, or give rise to a difference in opinions.
By eschewing the negative features pilloried in Lumis the university English conversation class can experiment with a number of approaches to communicative teaching. Kramsch (1993: 182-3) points to three intellectual traditions, the critical, the pragmatic and the hermeneutic citing Hunfeld from the latter tradition which stresses "putting the other in relation with the self":

[the foreign language]... also means being able to compare one's own world of language with that of others, to broaden one's experience with language and language use, to insert some uncertainty into ways of speaking one had hitherto taken for granted; it means border crossing, blockade, disturbance - in sum, to use Humboldt's words, it means 'acquiring a new way of viewing the world.'

My proposed model borrowing from the above three traditions, especially the critical and hermeneutical, may be characterized by the following criteria:

1) content (text) - based teaching to further cognitive and analytical skills.
2) authentic texts. (ie., written for adult native speakers of English)
3) emphasis on cultivating intellectual, ethical and aesthetic values.
4) opportunities to express opinions, and exchange information and knowledge.
5) encouragement of creativity, imagination and critical thinking.
6) integration of language skills with emphasis on reading and writing
7) homework - driven curriculum.

The above list of criteria simply represents a loose framework within which a communicative approach may be taken, steering a course away from the main pitfalls of the Eikaiwa class: either student boredom with grammar and rote-drilling, or apathy and silence commonly engendered by a "free conversation" format.

Rather than narrowly defining communicative teaching in a vain attempt to pin down a specific methodology it is more sensible to adopt the view of Nunan (1988:76-96) that a "weak" interpretation of communicative teaching allows the greatest degree of flexibility, recognizing that, "there is not one but a cluster of approaches" labelled "communicative". Nunan points out that many adult learners dislike and resist classroom techniques and activities that fall under the rubric of "communicative". He suggests" extensive consultation, negotiation and information exchange between the teacher and the learners", advice that is a sensible basis for a communicative class, but as Pica remarks "communicative classrooms are working. They are just not doing everything we would like them to do" (1996: 245). The lack of experience among Japanese students of negotiating with teachers (an alien concept in the Asian pedagogical tradition; see Nunn, 1996) means that initiatives at this level of communication must come mainly from the teacher who needs to show students that to engage in discussions with the teacher about teaching materials and syllabus is one way to conduct teacher-student communication. Although their proposals may be modest or even inappropriate, students should, be encouraged as an exercise in Western-style "give-and-take", essential for Japanese students wishing to use English later in life, as Breen suggests (1985: 62) arguing for "authentic language learning behavior" as opposed to "[authentic] language-using behavior", and concluding
(65):

Perhaps one of the main authentic activities within a language classroom is communication about how best to learn to communicate. Perhaps the most authentic language learning tasks are those which require the learner to undertake communication and metacommunication.

Thus giving students a more realistic idea of what they can achieve during the course sensitizes them to their role as language learners; this consciousness-raising facilitate the learning process for Japanese students numbed by years of rote-memorization and multiple-choice questions. As a corollary, according to Nunan, "student self-evaluation becomes more feasible", desirable for their ongoing educational development and consequently a basic principle of my approach. Other benefits for students are that, "Learning comes to be seen as the gradual accretion of achievable goals.", and, "Skills development can be seen as a gradual, rather than an all-or-nothing, process" (5).

The importance of this “curriculum model” in the “communicative” approach to teaching reflects the influence of the “process” curriculum pioneered by Stenhouse (1975) which Nunan justifiably calls “a paradigm-shift in language curriculum development”, noting that Stenhouse developed his model while wholly committed to "a subject-centered view of the curriculum", which, “may not necessarily be as relevant in systems subscribing to other philosophies or approaches.”

Stenhouse’s process model emphasises planning and empirical study. Planning consists of principles for the selection of content, the development of a teaching strategy, making decisions about sequence, and applying the aforementioned to meet the needs of individual students. The above may be subsumed under the prior-listed seven criteria, and will be referred to in more detail. The aim is to create an environment where communication becomes the process for the students’ reaching their goal of communication. Empirical study includes for studying and evaluating the progress of students, and feasibility of implementing the curriculum.

The latter point will be discussed in the reading and film sections while the former has already been broached in reference to exams and student self-evaluation. Homework assignments are a practical way to gauge student progress: English compositions as a solution to the problem of evaluating the students’ ability to communicate. Whereas it is difficult to monitor student progress in the spoken language after only 30 class hours a year vitiated by irregular attendance and long term breaks, it is useful to have a number of term composition papers for reference when determining final grades in consultation with the students who must justify their classroom performance and homework record over two semesters. Such portfolio assessment, although becoming popular in the US, is still rare in Japan (Connor, 1997).

Instead of pushing communicative learning centered on speaking, it is better to recognize the limited range of options of the Japanese system and try a communicative approach based on the integration of the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking for specific or focused purposes (Pica, 1996). Since competence in spoken
English among most students is either poor or non-existent, the prognosis for any significant progress in the spoken language alone can not for reasons already enumerated be considered good (see Ellis, 1991, 1992), especially as Miller points out (1995: 31-52), Western and Japanese student behavior differs so much that an oral communicative approach seems to be a doomed project at this point.

Hence the approach to language pedagogy suggested by Nunan involving the development of a curriculum based on educational rather than on strictly linguistic principles seems to offer the most promising solution to the problem of creating a meaningful English language pedagogy for non-major students.

Ellis (1991,1992) also makes a distinction between content-teaching goals and language-teaching goals, advocating English as a medium for carrying out conscience-raising tasks. Thus a “content-enriched” approach (Snow, 1991) is well suited to the language learning situation of Japanese students; student motivation to communicate based on “relevance” to their personal needs (Keller, 1983) and study through pleasure is a possibility if they are exposed to stimulating materials and learn to focus on the meaning of the content rather than on the form of the language. The input theory postulated by Krashen (1987) and Swain’s (1985) insistence that students should be given the opportunity to produce communicative language can be perfectly accommodated by a text-centered approach that stresses content and meaning.

The text (written, visual, and oral) therefore can become the fulcrum of a content-based communicative, approach with the text as the object of discourse around which communication takes place. Narrative is a key device for focusing student attention. In the form of oral anecdote, either personal or sourced from the media, it is an effective way of promoting listening comprehension because students love to listen to stories about happenings outside of their limited experience. Interestingly, anecdotes spun around etymology (English with its “five-storey” vocabulary structure is the most fascinating of all languages) help students to see that words have a history, do not have fixed meanings but change to meet the needs of the society; apart from helping students build a lexical corpus, etymology has a pedagogical function with radical implications for textual analysis (Attridge, 1987). All these approaches presuppose a strong element of teacher-centeredness to elicit the active participation of students by challenging their cognitive and emotional capacities, and arousing in them a sense of intellectual and affective empowerment, leading to a love of learning, a highly desirable goal. Exposing young minds to artistically powerful texts can foster the moral and intellectual development of students appropriate to a university education. Teaching language as (con)text can serve these aims, “not only to meet the needs of social maintenance, but potentially to bring about educational and social change” (Kramsch, 1993: 94).
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