

English Language Teaching and Learner's Communicative Competence in Japan

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(1) Japan's English Teaching in the Last 30 Years

In 1970s, Japan changed its aim of English teaching from giving students knowledge of English and European culture to developing communicative competence of students through English. So "English" has been taught for the Japanese pupils and students to develop their ability of communication with foreign people through English in the international society. The Japanese people have been expected to be able to communicate actively with foreign people in the international society after 10-year English learning in schools and universities.

(2) Spoken Form of English in Japan

So teaching of the spoken form of English in stead of reading printed materials has been stressed in the formal education of schools, junior high schools, senior high schools and colleges and universities throughout Japan. And "English conversation lessons" by native English teachers (speakers) have become very popular in public and private English classes particularly in urban cities over Japan. Printed form of spoken English is gradually becoming popular, particularly in lower schools, junior high schools and senior high schools, however, in the higher schools; colleges and universities, written form of English is still dominant, though some universities have started to give "listening test" as small part of their whole English test of the entrance examination.

(3) The Result Is Not Satisfactory

30 years have passed since the radical change of the English teaching in Japan. However, its result is not satisfactory for all levels of the people in Japan. All of the Japanese people who use English in the internationalized societies of the world; overseas travellers, businessmen, teachers, students, parents, governmental officers and even local shopkeepers of internationalized sightseeing spots, all of them criticize the result of the 30 years of English teaching in Japan. It has been repeatedly pointed out that the average score of the Japanese examinees of the TOEFL is very low in the country ranking. They are in unison discontending that Japanese people cannot communicate with foreign people through English.

(4) The Revolutionary Action Plan of English Teaching

In July of 2002, the Koizumi governmental cabinet declared a revolutionary action plan of English teaching for the Japanese people who can communicate with foreign people using English. The aim of the action plan is to educate the Japanese people who finish colleges and universities in Japan to the level of that they can use English in the work fields of international societies. The Japanese businessmen and office workers can work internationally with counterparts of the world by using English. The skills of using English are regarded as an important and strong means of communication in the workplaces of international societies.

(5) Design of the Present Paper

In these situations Japanese people are now required to look for the true way of developing the communicative competence through English. So I discuss the following 4 points in the present paper: (A) What is human communication? How is human communication realized? (B) What is speech communication? How is speech communication realized? (C) What is the difference between general communication and speech communication? (D) How can we develop the general competence of communication in schools of Japan?

(A) What is human communication? How is human communication realized?

(1) Human communication is realized through 5 senses.

Human communication is realized through 5 senses: hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching. These activities are realized by using sound waves, printed letters, distance, space, movement, smell, taste, feeling, posture, muscle-tension, figure, clothes, color, shape, etc.

(2) Communication has 2 stages.

Communication has 2 stages of encoding and decoding. Encoding is making messages and sending them. Decoding is receiving messages and understanding them. These two stages are alternatively and often simultaneously done all at the same time.

(3) We always send messages in various ways.

We always send messages in various ways through words we say as well as the way we speak. We also send messages through our appearance such as clothes, facial expressions, postures and gestures. We send constantly messages. We send messages intentionally. We also send messages unintentionally through gestures, muscular tension, or use of space. And we "read" our friend and enemy's signals.

We listen for tones of voice. We watch for eye contact. We make sure words match other clues. And other people do the same thing when communicating.

(4) General communication

Communication is to exchange messages, information and intention. The messages are composed of complex bundle of feelings (a bundle of susceptibilities, considerations, convictions or opinions), attitudes (a bundle of the ways we think or feel about on object, person, event, etc.), beliefs (a bundle of firm convictions about something), and values (a bundle of ideas or views held dear, desirable, useful, worthy). Each person has his or her own bundle of feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and values. The messages made by each unique person are also unique. People are exchanging these unique messages every moment of every day.

(5) The messages are made from impressions.

The messages are made from impressions (data) from our surroundings. We absorb impressions from every event happening in the world around us. Through our 5 senses (hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching), we pick up data through a million of sensations. And we have impressions in our body (brain). We sort and store these impressions to create our personal view of the world. Every person has his or her own impressions. No one has exactly same impressions as the other. No one sees things exactly same as the other do. The impressions are unique. So the messages are also unique.

(6) In our brain

When we receive messages through our 5 senses, we take the following processes in our brain: We select the messages: the most interesting things to respond to, the best data as information and the most needed information,

etc. We store the selected messages which will be used in future and compare them to what we already know. We arrange them. And we store them in our memory bank of the brain. We make decisions about what the messages mean and what we'll say about them. We verify the messages. We confirm that the messages are accurate. We judge whether the messages are true or not.

(7) Thinking

Communication is realized by all of these activities that take place in our brain, which is called "thinking." It is the key to effective communication. We reflect, contemplate, judge and decide whether the communication data is true or not. We make choices about the ways we speak and listen. These choices decide our communication ways, attitudes and behavior with others. Communicating is more complex than just speaking and listening. It needs a variety of broad perception, deep thinking, various experiences to make meaningful responds and to complete expected communication.

(8) What do we send by communication?

① We send how we see ourselves.

Each individual as a human being sees oneself uniquely. For example, a shy individual who lacks confidence might talk very softly and evade eye contact. An assertive and confident person might speak energetically and hold eye contact.

② We send how others see us.

The picture others have of us affects how we approach others. If our image says "he is informative of classic music," he might be asked of classic music. "What do you like of piano pieces of Beethoven?" If our image says, "He is tall, big and athletic," he might be invited to play as a sumo wrestler.

③ We send how we feel at the moment.

Our current feelings of satisfaction, frustration, stress, or "the blues" can change our speaking manner. The manager of a winning team of professional baseball normally talks much after the night match, but the counter manager of the lost team doesn't like to respond to the sport-news reporter's questions.

④ We send how we think about things.

Life experiences shape our attitudes, beliefs, and values and affect the way we communicate. As we mature and gain more experiences, we change our behavior. We are not the same now as we were when we entered in the first grade of a primary school. When we were children, we spoke as children. As adults, our communication styles are based on a whole range of our experiences.

⑤ We send how we behave.

Our actions and behavior affect our interaction with others. The standing distance we choose when we have a conversation makes the communication situation friendly or opponently. An appropriate distance may seem friendly and acceptable. A too-close distance may seem hostile, aggressive, or inappropriate, while a too-far distance may seem standoffish or disinterested. It is necessary for all speakers to select appropriate topics in appropriate situation with an appropriate manner.

(B) What is speech communication? How is speech communication realized?

(1) Sound codes to represent messages

People communicate with each other using language. People use symbolic sound codes to represent messages. The most satisfying and useful device is "speech" as sound waves. Speech is a useful means of getting to know and understand other people. It is realized by a way of verbalizing what we think and believe so that others can understand us through it. Speech is

necessary device for all human beings to live and communicate with each other. People use speech to send messages in many ways.

(2) The feedback process

The speech communication is realized as follows: Speakers transform their ideas into oral language (message) and send it to listeners. The message is usually verbal (words) but very often nonverbal (actions, gestures, voice). The verbal message is carried by sound waves, and the nonverbal message is carried by light waves. Listeners take the message. They hear the verbal message by their ears. They see the nonverbal message by their eyes. And they decode the message into meaning. Listeners understand the message. And the feedback process, through which the receiver gives the response to the sender, is very often added to the plain speaker-listener communication process.

(3) What do we send by speech communication?

① Speech is used to create social contact.

In a social context, speech is used to greet friends, colleagues, co-workers and customers. It is used to exchange social conversation, converse about illnesses and accidents, chat about upcoming events, and maintain personal relationships. We also use speech to get important information such as time and place of an event, which team won the last night's base ball match, and who hit a home-run in the last night game.

② Speech is used to exchange information.

Speech is critical in gathering and exchanging information. With speech, we can ask for further explanation, outline an idea or process, clear up a difficult point, illustrate a concept by giving an example, and answer or ask questions. We can also expand our ideas by presenting research data, lecturing on a interesting topic, participating in a dialogue, describing facts, or talking our experiences.

③ Speech is used to change the behavior of others.

Speech is used to stimulate others to take actions, different attitudes or to present their viewpoints. It is used to encourage an open exchange of ideas. By speech, we can order others to do something. We can counsel or give advice. We share personal convictions and praise the work of others. We give logical reasons of conducts and cite evidence. We talk and describe personal experiences.

④ Speech is used to solve personal or social problems.

In our personal and social lives, speech is used to identify problems. It is used to isolate causes of the problem. It is used to consider alternative courses of action. It is used to propose possible solutions.

(C) What is the difference between general communication and speech communication?

(1) Speech activities are supported by other channels of communication.

As we have seen above, speech communication can send surely many variety of messages to other people, and it is very refined, sophisticated, minute, detailed, deep, complicated, specific, pinpointed, etc. It seems that it can do all of the functions of communication. But it is far from truth. We must know that speech communication must be supported and complemented by other channels of communication such as distance, place, timing, action, body movement, facial expressions, gestures, postures, possessions, and so on, even if we use it appropriately. For example, if we give order to a group of people and say, "Forwards! March!" the action (the group of the people begin to march forwards) must be witnessed to know that the communication is completed. All of words of order are like this: "Stand on your head." "Carry the desk to the next room." "Give me 1,000 yen." These

sentences (speech) must be accompanied by the actions and witnessed by the speaker to know the speech functions satisfactorily in the communication. When I say to my friend, "This is my car," we need to show really my car itself to my friend. And the existence of a car is essential for the speech to have the meaning as communication. My friend needs to have look of my car to know the size of the car, and the shape of the car, and the color of the car. And if he can touch my car, the communication activity of showing my car to my friend is more completely realized than giving only speech to my friend, "I have a car." Generally speaking, almost all speech activities are supported by other channels of communication.

(2) General communication is a package of signals.

General communication is a package of signals, a total of actions. So messages, as signals, exchange through the channels of voice, body language, space, time, appearance as well as words. General communication uses very wide range of channels of perception, 5 senses. General communication can not be completed by language channel only but can be completed by other perceptual channels including speech. We need tactful use of combination of several perceptual organs.

(3) Speech communicator can not do two roles of communication at a same time.

Speech communication has another shortage for desirable communication. One person can not do two roles of communication at a same time. In other words, the speaker sends messages and the listener receives them at a time. They can not do both roles at a same time. And next time they swap their roles alternatively. Imagine that spoken message exchange where one person speaks to his friend who is the listener and waits for the message, and then the

friend becomes the speaker and gives answers to the original speaker, who is the present listener some time later. This alternative exchange of roles of speech takes certain time. This is not desirable from the view point of time economy of communication.

(4) We exchange multimessages simultaneously in face-to-face interaction.

However, face-to-face interaction of communication is not necessarily an alternating process in which two people take turns speaking and listening to each other. It is far from that. We human beings have very fabulous skills. We can send and receive multiple messages all at a same time in face-to-face communication. In the situation, a person can speak (encode an oral message) while watching the receiver's feedback (decoding the nonverbal message). In other words, if the speaker is talking to listener, he checks listener's response of the message as he speaks by using non-verbal signals. If the speaker finds a questioning look, a shrug of the shoulders or a frown of the face on the listener, he can notice it immediately by the feedback which is sent as a non-verbal signal to the speaker. The speaker changes his way of speaking. In real communication activity, we exchange multimessages simultaneously. We use fabulous skills of communication in face-to-face interaction.

(5) The speaker and the listener must use common words.

Speech communication has another shortage. The speaker and the listener must use common spoken words which produce similar images in both partners' brain. Each person, the speaker and the listener, has usually different attitudes, beliefs, and values, and they still talk to each other differently and we must understand one another in condition of that we recognize our differences and we are using the same language. So if we hope to be understood by other

people, we must learn to produce similar mental images for each other through common spoken words. This needs really very difficult learning and training. Speech communication needs really very broad and meticulous training for us to be understood by others.

(D) What should we do to develop the competence of general communication in schools?

(1) The dynamics of general communication

Japanese people are expected to be a good English communicator. They are expected to know the dynamics of oral English communication in the present modern world, where Japanese people are expected to interact with other people in English and contribute themselves for the construction of peace world. In the meaning, Japanese people are required to learn English and to have the skills of English communication; the skills of greeting in English, telephoning in English, face-to-face interviewing in English, discussion on a topic in English, and presentation in English. They are required to learn the skills of English use to the satisfactory level. They are required to be more active in using English in the international societies. They are required to learn the skills of understanding others and making others understand, listening to others and giving instructions to others. They are required to learn the skills of organizing and delivering a presentation in English. They are required to be active in the present and future international societies using English. They are required to develop the skills of general communication through all of the 5 perceptual senses, the dynamics of general communication.

(2) The English teachers in Japan need to reduce the time of explanation.

The English teachers in Japan need to reduce the time of explanation in English classes.

Increase the time of practice of the students to develop their skills for general communication. Increase the amount of practice of using English in English classes. Extend their experience of using English in the broad sense of communication situation. Give the students opportunities of using English in real, or virtual real language situation. English learning is to have experiences of using English.

(3) The different ways of communication in different situations

The Japanese students need to know the difference of the usage of language in different situations. In deep personal sharing communication situation with those who are parents, partners and lovers, we use private talk or family talk to express our feelings and things in common. In close friendships communication situation with close friends, we use friendly talk including familiar slangs where the topics are daily events, hobbies, entertainment, jobs, family, etc. In business and school communication situation with co-workers and class-mates, the communication talk is about mutual concerns, common acquaintances and shared goals. In casual encounter communication situation, the topics are weather, sports, current events, the common activities or interests, etc. The talking style is polite, small and casual conversation. In communication situation with strangers, the talking style is less intimate. The topics are greetings, self-introduction, guide of the community, and other exchange of information to establish social relationships.

(4) The different use of language in different situations

The Japanese students need to know that language is a tool for communication and that language must be adjusted for many communication situations. The language we use in talking to our friends is not the same as the words

we use in a university lecture class. The most important element in choosing appropriate language is our listener. In informal situations such as in a school canteen or on a picnic, casual words, slang, and relaxed comments are allowed to be used there. However, in formal situations such as ceremonies, interviews, reports, presentations, or business conferences, formal and technical terms are necessarily used. Clear reporting language, careful inferences, and cautious judgements are desirably selected there. Informal language such as colloquialism of slang is out of place. We also should be careful for technical language. It should be used only when listeners share the same vocabulary. We must be also careful to use specialized language to describe products, types of tools, and processes in a workplace. Unless others understand these terms, they should not be used.

(5) Reduce psychological anxiety

The Japanese students also need to know how to reduce psychological anxiety when we use English with foreign people. We have anxiety problems when we are going to have a conversation or interview, or take part in discussion, or speak in front of a group. We have necessarily psychological anxiety. It is self-anxiety and related to the way other people respond to us. This is a worry about how to we deliver the message. So we need to know how to rescue ourselves from the fear of English communication anxiety. We need to know how to prepare English messages and how to deliver the messages effectively to others. We need to know how to take control of the talking energy. We need to know how to handle our nervousness; how to breathe, how to look at our audience and how to smile at them, when we make speech in front of large audience. We need to know how to manage communication tensions.

(6) Experience of English communication

In English lessons of the schools in Japan, the students should have more experiences and opportunities of using English: data collection in English, presentation style of learning in English, pair lessons between students in English, group lessons among students in English. English teachers should reduce their explanation of English, reduce their demonstration of English use, which seems proud of their own English ability. The demonstration of English use is not for teachers but for the students. So increase the opportunities to listen to a variety of English including non-native English speakers' English such as Japanese friends' English. The model of English language should be not limited only to American English and British English, but "Japanese English" should be also introduced in the classes. The Japanese students should learn international English which includes "Japanese English," "Chinese English," "Korean English," etc.

English teaching for Japanese people is to develop their general communicative competence through English in its broad sense of language use, not only in English speaking countries such as America, Britain, etc., but also in the international societies such as in the United Nations, Asian, African and European countries.

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日本における英語教育と 日本人のコミュニケーション能力について

柏瀬 省五

日本における英語教育は、英語を通して欧米文化に馴染むことから、英語を使って外国人とコミュニケーションがとれるようにする方向に、1970年代に、その目標を根本的に転換した。以来約30年が経過したが、その結果は満足するものではない。2002年、小泉内閣は、「英語が使える日本人」を育成するための行動計画を発表して、英語を使って国際的に活躍できる日本人を育成することに、国を挙げて邁進することにした。

この論文では、このような文脈の中で、(1)「コミュニケーションとはどのようなものか、どのように実現されているか。」(2)「英語によるコミュニケーションとは、どのようになされているか、どのように実現されているか。」(3)「広い意味でのコミュニケーションと狭い意味での言語によるコミュニケーションはどこが違うか。」(4)「日本の学校において、狭い意味での言語教育にとらわれず、もっと広い意味でのコミュニケーションの能力を養成をするためには何をどのようにすべきか。」を検討した。

広い意味でのコミュニケーションは、五感すべてをバランスよく使って実現されるものである。狭い範囲の英語使用の学習だけでは、広い意味でのコミュニケーション能力は養成されない。そのためには、英語学習の教室では、英語についての説明の多い授業は止め、広い意味でのコミュニケーション能力の養成、すなわち、学習者が英語使用者としての生活体験を増やす英語教育に転換する必要がある。

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