

ナチュラルアプローチの視点から日本の英語教授法を検証する

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An Examination of How to Teach English in Japan When Considering It from the Natural Approach Viewpoint

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Abstract

The English educational system of Japan is in a period of transition at the moment. In particular, new tests for applicants applying to university has dramatically changed in regards to English testing. However, the present application of English education in the classroom currently lags behind the rest of world. Although the present rate of teachers communicating in English in the classroom is 54 percent in high schools, with 74 percent in junior high schools respectively (MEXT, 2019), it is salient that most of the instruction is still conducted in Japanese, in particular, using the grammar translation method (GTM) (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Narita, 2013; Suzuki & Roger, 2014). Also, Machida (2019) pointed out teachers' lack of command of English and concerns about students' learning as well as practical training opportunities to develop their English communication skills to be ready for successful policy implementation. In this paper, I examined how English teaching in Japan at secondary school level should be integrated into the Natural Approach, a kind of pioneering method of language teaching in respect of (a) the order of grammatical morphemes used in the authorized textbook, (b) 'Sentence-Situation' instruction, being made use of the graded direct method (GDM).

1. Introduction

Due to the global spread of English, the governments of non-native speaking coun-

tries have undertaken language education reforms (Phillipson, 2009) implementing early English education, monolingual instruction and hiring an increased number of native English teachers. In some non-native speaking countries, teaching higher education in English in content studies has become popular (Tamtam, Gallagher; Olabi, & Naher, 2012). Many schools encourage teaching in English (hereafter the monolingual method) without consensus about its effects. Consequently, the amount of research on English language teaching and the related learning principles have increased dramatically. However, in Japan there are still many English teachers who teach English as a means to the end of passing the university entrance examination as Cook (2016, p.208) states, “Teachers in Japan target the language learning goal for their future both seeking for jobs in the country and working abroad. However, most students take it for passing the entrance exams”, so it seems that Japanese English education is far behind the current trend towards communicative English.

To improve teaching for second language acquisition, much research has been conducted. Since the late 1960s, the communicative approach views language as communication. Other approaches such as total physical response, the silent way and the natural approach (Terrell collaborated with Stephen Krashen) have followed. Then, Focus on Form, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) are more recent. According to Ellis, TBLT is based on the same principles as the natural approach (Ellis, R., 2018). Thus, as a fundamental method of monolingual instruction, the theories of the natural approach are worth examining.

In this paper, the way English is taught in Japan at secondary school level was examined. Then, the theory of the natural approach was discussed and how this theory can relate to classroom practice was assessed, thus leading to two suggestion to modify the current delivery of Japanese English education.

2. The history of GTM and resultant issues in Japan

The grammar translation method has been the traditional approach in Japan since before World War II. It was not until the late 19th century that English was taught in secondary schools as a foreign language. Until then Japan only had experience of teaching Dutch as a foreign language. Dutch was instructed in terms of comprehension of the grammatical rules and translation from Dutch into Japanese, because the crucial purpose of learning Dutch was to read technical or medical articles. It wasn't just the

historical influence of Dutch language policy, it was also true that for the first decades after World War II, spoken communication in the target language was not necessary on a wide scale, but understanding foreign publications, technical documents, laws, etc. was very important. Despite a marked increase in the number of Japanese working, studying and travelling outside the country, and a similar increase of foreign films operating in Japan and foreigners living and working in Japan, Japanese English teachers “overwhelmingly use Japanese” (Gorsuch, 1998, p.10) as a means of instruction in class due to their “adhere to the traditional GTM” (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008, p.134). Also, MEXT (2016) found that more than 51% of SHS teachers and 41% of JHS teachers mainly used Japanese for teaching the subjects Communication English I and English respectively, and they used this to argue that teachers provided insufficient target language input to students.

According to Stern (1983, p.454) the objectives of the traditional grammar translation method are as follows:

In the nineteenth century grammar translation was considered by practitioners as necessary preliminary to the study of literary works, and even if that goal was not reached, grammar translation was regarded as an educationally valid mental discipline in its own right. Grammar translation lays little or no emphasis on the speaking of the second language or listening to second language speech; it is a mainly book-oriented method of working out and learning the grammatical system of the language.

This approach regards language learning as consisting of memorizing grammatical rules in order to understand the morphology and syntax of the target language taught mainly in first language (L1), which applies to the situation that Gorsuch (1998) pointed out. Therefore, the grammar translation method requires a high understanding of language structure, rather than speaking performance. Japanese is the main means of interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. Although researchers who are against English-only policies have pointed out benefits of L1 use in second language (L2), classrooms (e.g., Meyer, 2008; Nation, 2003; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Weschler, 1997), “too much use of the native language in the classroom” (Brown, 2007, p.247) has often received attention for being problematic.

3. The Natural Approach and its application in Japan

According to J. Richards and T. Rogers (1986, p.128), the natural approach was proposed by Tracy Terrell, a teacher of Spanish in California, in 1977. This methodology is based on naturalistic principles that researchers had identified in studies of second language acquisition. Since then Terrell and others have experimented with the natural approach in elementary up to advanced level classes with several other languages. At the same time Terrell collaborated with Stephen Krashen, an applied linguist at University of Southern California, to promote the natural approach based on Krashen's influential theory of second language acquisition. They published a book, *The Natural Approach* in 1983. This book is separated into two sections: a theoretical section prepared by Krashen that is based on his view of second language acquisition; and a summary of Terrell's classroom procedures.

Krashen and Terrell emphasize the theoretical aspect of the natural approach compared to the previous teaching methods such as the audiolingual approach. They stated:

The central hypothesis of the theory is that language acquisition occurs in only one way: by understanding messages. We acquire language when we obtain comprehensible input, when we understand what we hear or read in another language. This means that acquisition is based primarily on what we hear and understand, not what we say. The goal, then, of elementary language classes, according to this view, is to supply comprehensible input, the crucial ingredient in language acquisition, and to bring the student to the point where he or she can understand language outside the classroom. When this happens, the acquirer can utilize the real world, as well as the classroom, for progress.

(Krashen and Terrell, 1983, p.1)

The natural approach insists on using the target language in the classroom. The theory is based on five hypotheses:

The acquisition and learning hypothesis

There are two ways for learners to approach learning a second language: they may acquire it or learn it.

The monitor hypothesis

The acquired system (a subconscious process that arises when learners are using language for communication) acts to initiate the speaker's utterance and judgments, but the learned system (a conscious process that arises when learners are using language for understanding and memorizing its rules) acts only as an editor or monitor.

The natural order hypothesis (briefly outlined on page 6)

The rules of a language should be acquired in a predictable sequence- some rules are acquired early while others are acquired late.

The input hypothesis

Comprehensible input beyond the learner's current level of competence is necessary to acquire language.

1. The input hypothesis relates to acquisition, not learning.
2. We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence (i+1). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information.
3. When appropriate +1 input is provided, this input is understood.
4. Production ability emerges as a result of this process. It is not taught directly.

(Krashen, 1982, pp.22-23)

The affective filter hypothesis

There are some imaginary barriers which prevents learners from using input which is available in their environments. 'Affect' means motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. If learner are tense, angry, anxious, it will block out learning and limit what is attended to or what is acquired. The filter will be 'up' when the learner is stressed or unmotivated, while the filter will be 'down' when the learner is relaxed or motivated.

Each of the above five hypotheses provides many hints to help improve language teaching in Japan. If acquisition is ideal and rule-oriented learning is less important, the most important thing we have to pay attention to is how we acquire languages. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the input hypothesis and doing so requires a practical examination of the natural approach.

Putting the natural approach into practice in the classroom may be appealing, as it sounds as if teachers only have to provide level-appropriate interesting things to talk

about. As mentioned above, the effectiveness of the natural approach relies on the ability of teachers to provide content pertinent to students' lives, conveyed in a grammatical structure a bit beyond students' current level of competence ($i+1$). Attempting to teach a useful understanding of the remarkably complex rules of English grammar is certainly a difficult endeavor. The practical implications of the natural approach are no less difficult, though very different. If we are to assume that the natural approach requires a different classroom orientation in order to have students be able to effectively communicate, teachers should be imaginative, flexible, in tune with students' interests, and prepared with the next $i+1$ as students move from one level of competence to the next.

As terms of settlement, Krashen (1983, p.33) states, when a speaker uses roughly-tuned input so that the learner understands the message, the speaker "casts a net" of structure around the learner's current level, and this net will include instances of $i+1$. Therefore, input need not be "finely-tuned" especially in the classroom where learners are at many different levels of competence. Speaking emerges independently over time, after the acquirer has built up linguistic competence by understanding input.

Therefore, two policy implications can be drawn from these five hypotheses to apply in the Japanese classroom.

1. It is important to present as much comprehensible, conversational input as possible.
2. In order to lower the affective filter, teachers should bear student-centered tasks in mind, based on meaningful communication rather than grammatical form. In order to do this, teachers should choose current, interesting topics as much as possible to suit students' present levels of knowledge.

4. How to combine the Grammar Translation Method in Japan with the Natural Approach

In this section I have discussed how to improve upon the current system. The natural approach theory suggests many clues to improve the grammar translation method in Japan. One key issue raised is whether it is possible to provide comprehensible input by using the order in which the national curriculum introduces key grammatical concepts (as detailed below). A second key issue concerns how effectively teaching grammar leads to acquisition.

As to the first issue, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) suggest that there are still some unanswered questions in the grammar morpheme acquisition literature, such as L1

influence, and individual learner factor, Nonetheless, second language learners tend to acquire a set of English grammatical morphemes in a similar order. Thus, for the first step we should re-examine the order of grammar morphemes to teach. In Krashen's natural approach theory, he puts forward the natural order hypothesis to provide comprehensible input to learners. It means the process to acquire a second language is the same as the first language in early childhood as follows:

“One important finding has been that, in both first and second language acquisition, there are sequences or ‘stages’ in the development of a particular structure. That is, certain features of the language seem to appear relatively early in a learner’s language while others are acquired much later. A somewhat surprising finding is that these developmental sequences are similar across from different backgrounds; what is learned early by one can also be learned early by others.

(Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada, *How languages are learned*, p.57, underlining by Wakayama)

Brown (1973) suggests the same chronological order for teaching grammatical morphemes as Krashen’s ‘natural order’:

Present progressive - ing (Mommy running),

Plural-s,

Irregular past forms, Possessive - 's,

Copula (is),

Articles ‘the’ and ‘a’,

Regular past - ed,

Third person singular simple present -s,

Auxiliary ‘be’ (He is running).

On the other hand, the order of grammar morphemes used to teach in Japan should be pointed out. For example, the order of grammar morphemes to teach is as follows in the Japanese junior high school’s text book:

Copula (is, am, are),

Articles ‘a’ and ‘the’,
Plural-s, Possessive -’s,
Third person singular simple present -s,
Auxiliary ‘can’,
Present progressive -ing,
Regular past -ed,
Irregular past forms,
Auxiliary ‘will’

(NEW CROWN English Series New Edition 1.2., 2015)

To answer how effective is rapport when teaching the order of grammar morphemes requires further comprehensive input, the Graded Direct Method (GDM) should thus be an indicator since GDM follows the similar order of grammar morphemes to teach as the natural approach. Also, the effects of the GDM are proven (see, e.g. Benitez, C., Conzalez, P., Ochoa, C., Varaga, A., 2019; Small, B., 2014), in which students learned the order of grammar morphemes more readily. For example, making clear contrasts such as introducing ‘is, was, will be’ at the same time, or irregular past first, then simple past tense. Therefore, re-examining the order of grammar morphemes to teach making use of GDM should be a clue, which leads us to reconsider how the natural order of L2 connects with comprehensible input.

Another key issue concerning how effectively teaching grammar leads to acquisition was discussed. Krashen insists that “acquired knowledge” can only be developed when a learner’s attention is focused on meaningful communication (implicit knowledge). If comprehensible input is successful, meaningful communication will be provided. However, it is difficult to state that translation, grammar exercise, and error corrections lead to “acquired knowledge” as Lee, McCune, and Patton state (cited in Krashen, 1982, p.68) “experimental evidence suggests that students pay little or no attention to meaning after the first few repetitions in pattern drill”. Also, Machida (2016, 2019) points out, even Japanese English teachers not only have language anxiety in using English, but also have concerns about students’ learning that all English is too difficult for students to learn, thus leading having a lack of confidence in English communication and a lack of experience in preparing English lessons.

So provided teachers use meaningful context-based introduction in order for learners

to understand the meaning, then it will be an indication that we can present 'comprehensible input' to learners. To do so, 'Sen-Sit' instruction on GDM (see, e.g. Benitez, C., Conzalez, P., Ochoa, C., Varaga, A., 2019; Small, B., 2014) is applicable to modify this situation. Also, I had been practicing it at Musashi Junior and Senior High School in Tokyo for more than 15 years and achieved results. In 'Sen-Sit' instruction, teachers must connect the words and phrases into the situation in which they are using via the relevant pictures and exemplification when teaching the targeted words and phrases. Among recent SLA studies, to enhance pragmatic proficiency for Japanese learners of English, Takemoto (2007) concludes, "an important pedagogical implication of this study is that teachers should be aware that effective learning occurs when tasks provide learners with opportunities for processing pragmatic features of target structures." Also, to verify the input enhancement hypothesis proposed by Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993), Zhaohong, H., Eun, S.P. and Charles, C. state (2008, p.604) "in other words, learners might benefit more from having their attention first directed to meaning decoding and then to grammatical encoding than to both tasks at the same time.", recommending sequential processing over simultaneous processing.

5. Conclusion and further discussion

In this paper some of the limitations of the grammar translation method have been examined. For those of us who still use the grammar translation method, Krashen's theory about second language acquisition gives us many clues as how to modify our teaching method and how to examine or modify our present methods to facilitate comprehensible input for students. In particular, the first step forward, I urge the questioning of the order of grammar morphemes when teaching with the Japanese junior high school's text book, and grammar teaching in the Japanese classroom setting. Although there is no panacea in language teaching, I firstly recommend reconsidering the order of grammar morphemes in textbooks and secondly using meaningful context-based introduction for both grammar and reading comprehension classes, thus contributing language acquisition to learners. In doing so, it may provide a crucial insight for the current delivery of Japanese English education.

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日本の英語教育は、現在移行期にある。「大学入学共通テスト」における英語の試験は劇的に変化した。しかし、教室での英語教育の現状はあまり変化していない。教室で英語を使用している教師の割合は、高校で54%、中学校でそれぞれ74%である（文部科学省、2019年）。しかしながら、いまだに日本語での指導が多いことは注目に値する。「文法訳読法（GTM）」を使用（Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Narita, 2013; Suzuki & Roger, 2014）しているか、町田（2019）は、「教師の英語力の欠如、それから来る不安、英語を使用することによる生徒の学習促進への懸念、および教師の英語力を伸ばすための実践的なトレーニングの場の欠如」を指摘している。この論文では、言語教育では先駆的な指導法である「ナチュラルアプローチ」の視点から現状の英語の教え方の見直しとして（a）文法項目の教える「順序」（過去形の規則変化から不規則変化など）は現状のままでよいのか、（b）段階的英語直接教授法（GDM）の「文脈重視の指導法」の有用性の2点に絞り検証した。