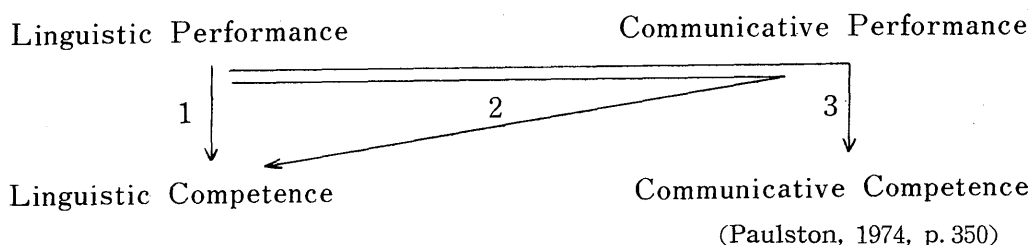


Theoretical Foundation for Teaching Communicative Competence in the English Language Classroom in Japan

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(Received March 24, 1980)

The goal of the English conversation class is for the students to use both their passive vocabulary and their previously learned grammatical patterns, and "generalize into previously un-uttered patterns." (Berwick, 1975, p.283) But, in addition, it is not only necessary that they know *how* to say something, but also *what* and *when* to say it. Paulston suggests a model for language teaching that takes into account the above mentioned goals.



Prior to discussing the strategies labeled 1, 2, and 3, Paulston defines the terms:

Linguistic Competence: (using Chomsky's definition 1968) The native speaker's knowledge of his own language, the set or system of internalized rules about the language which enables him to create new grammatical sentences and to understand sentences spoken to him, to reject *"the ate goldfish John" as un-English and to recognize that "flying planes can be dangerous" is ambiguous.

Linguistic Performance: The actual utterance, what the speaker actually says, which often imperfectly reflects the underlying competence.

(Chomsky, 1968)

Communicative Competence: The social rules of language use, (Hymes, 1972 a, b), the systematic sets of social interactional rules (Grimshaw, 1973, p.109).

Communicative Performance: Communication which carries no distinctive social significance. In the real world this is not possible, but in the artificial world of language classrooms, these are communicative activities which lack specific deep structures of social meaning...the students simply function with their native rules of speaking.

(Paulston, 1974, p. 350)

Paulston goes on to make the following remarks about the strategies identified in her model. Strategy One is merely practice in the rules and utterances of a language. It is not likely to produce fluent speakers, a fact to which both the

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products of grammar-translation and classic ALM attest. Strategy Two combines skill-getting exercises (drills, dialogues, rules, etc.) with skill-using activities...It will under propitious circumstances (good programs, trained teachers, motivated students) result in linguistic competence. For Paulston, Strategy Three is the most efficient language teaching. (Paulston, 1974, pp.352-3) It is Strategy Three that aims toward the attainment of the goals of the conversation class—that the students know not only *how* to say something, but also *what* and *when* to say it. The strategy emphasized in Japan until recently was the first. The students I teach at Chubu Institute of Technology for example, are “products” of the grammar-translation method and subsequently, are not fluent speakers. It is Paulston’s belief that Strategy Two is sufficient for an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) situation, whereas Strategy Three “applies primarily to situations where the learners live in the country of the target language,” i.e. an ESL (English as a Second Language) situation. (1974, p.354) It is my contention that Strategy Three is necessary for students in Japan, where, if not an ESL situation, it is not an EFL situation either. Strategy Three is necessary to teach English as a language of wider communication (LWC).

That English meets many of the requirements of a true international lingua franca, i.e. a language of wider communication, is discussed by Fishman et al. in *The Spread of English*. Thus, English is important to the Japanese because “Japan remains the only world power without a world language...it is the only major country whose language is spoken only within its own borders.” (Jansen, 1974, p.8) In light of the role of English as a LWC and “Japan’s increasing wish to understand and become an acceptable part of the world community,” the Japanese now consider English “to be more important to them than it has ever been in the past and the demand for the ability in spoken English is great and growing.” (British Council, 1977, pp.5-6) For this reason, Strategy Three seems the appropriate choice for English language instruction in Japan.

Employing Strategy Three in the conversation classroom involves instruction in the social rules of language use. Among the notions which such a theory (of communicative competence) must deal with are those of the “speech community, speech situation, speech event, speech act, fluent speaker, components of speech events, functions of speech, etc.” (Hymes, 1972b, p.53) As Stratton points out, “Communicative competence is as yet ill-defined as is made clear by Hymes’ list of its constituents...which ends with ‘etc.’” (1977, p.135); therefore, teachers must frequently rely on their intuitions. Paulston, too, comments on this aspect of communicative competence:

The difficulty with so many rules of communicative competence is that we don’t consciously know many of our own, much less those of another culture. This is where the teacher becomes an anthropologist, by listening to students, observing behavior and most of all by being aware and alert to possible conflicts.

(1974, p.356)

Related to this is Paulston's earlier remark that:

It is easier to keep one's linguistic codes separate than one's social codes as one often is not aware of the social codes on a conscious level until they are violated. It is much easier to be bilingual than bicultural.

(1974, p. 352)

That many of the rules of speaking are unconscious habits is also noted by Applegate. He points out that there is a natural tendency to "regard our own rules of speaking not as culture-specific but as part of human nature." (1975, p. 272)

There may be, in fact, some rules of speaking that are part of so-called human nature. Grimshaw postulates the existence of a universal grammar of social interaction. Data for this grammar would come from anthropology (reminiscent of Paulston's "teacher as anthropologist" quoted above), sociology, and ethnography. The grammar would account for "interactional rules for individual societies" and these rules would be analogous to the linguistic rules for languages. (1973, p. 99) Grimshaw believes that his postulate has important implications for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) teachers, who should at least acknowledge:

the existence of a complex set of rules in a grammar of social interaction—and the further reality that while there may be a grammar of social interaction, there are also grammars (plural) of social interaction for different groups.

(1973, p. 104)

It is Applegate's advice that the language teacher "become aware of these cultural differences in language use, to recognize which points are likely to prove difficult for a particular student, and to guide the student accordingly." (1975, p. 271)

There are significant cultural differences in language use when one compares Japanese speakers with English speakers. The following paragraphs will present these differences by means of a contrastive analysis. The examples are hopefully representative but by no mean exhaustive. In addition, one must "recognize the relativity of these rules of speaking" and that one can "too easily form stereotypes." (Applegate, 1975, p. 20) The aim here is to make useful generalizations and to avoid at all costs *overgeneralizing*. For the Japanese student studying English, expectations and interpretations are likely to differ regarding the following rules of speaking: roles of silence, how information is organized and shared, and norms of interaction such as criticizing and interrupting.

The Role of Silence: According to Nishiyama (1973), "verbal aggressiveness is not a Japanese virtue as children are trained from early childhood not to talk too much. They learn not to speak during meals, to strangers, and in public unless it is absolutely necessary to do so." (In Ishii et al., 1978, p. 1) Ogasawara claims that "in traditional Japan, talking is perhaps not thought of as an important skill." (1970, p. 61) Ogasawara goes on to say that "those who talk a lot are thought to lack character, unless they are talking to close friends or family." (1970, p. 61) This view is supported with research by Ishikawa (1970) who writes that:

76% of the Japanese business people surveyed believe a "silent" man rather

than an "eloquent" man will succeed in business in Japan. Over 65% of the women questioned in the same survey chose "silent" men over "eloquent" men as candidates for marriage...many Japanese who regard themselves as "eloquent" would prefer to be "silent."

(Ishii et al., 1978, p. 2)

In contrast, Karl Reisman notes that:

Many Americans (and many English people) have a rule that in social conversations silences must be filled. A silence maintained too long is a sign of some kind of failure of rapport (unless it is defined as somehow seeking the solution to a problem, etc.)

(In Applegate, 1975, p. 272)

On the other hand, Nishida (1977) points out that "the Japanese can sit together quite comfortably without saying a word to each other." (Ishii et al., 1978, p. 2)

Ishii et al. have labeled the different styles of communicating for the Japanese and American as aesthetic versus cognitive, respectively.

To the Japanese, the communicator's feelings or attitudes are crucial (the aesthetic style). To the Americans, the exchange of ideas or messages is foremost (the cognitive style). For the Japanese, it's a maximum of nonverbal; for the Americans, it's a minimum of nonverbal messages and a maximum of verbal. The Japanese "read" feelings; the Americans listen to words.

(1978, p. 9)

Condon and Kurata explain this in terms of the 'hara', where "man's spirit lies hidden, well protected":

From the 'hara' there radiate thoughts, communication so intimate that there is no need for words. This is 'haragei', "hara-to-hara communication." To fully understand another, one must "read the hara" (hara o yomu).

(1974, p. 66)

Condon and Kurata conclude that "the Japanese have long believed that not speaking is preferable to speech, and thus reading the 'hara' or communicating without speech is a model of communication. (1974, p. 69)

How Information is Organized and Shared: There is also a contrast between Japanese and American manner of speaking in regards to direct versus non-direct talk: "The Japanese are apt to be indirect in their communication, using intermediary symbols or persons to get their feelings or ideas across, while the Americans are up-front and direct." (Ishii et al., 1978, p. 10) Ogasawara also comments upon the Japanese tendency to avoid speaking directly:

Japanese people are interested in creating a pleasant atmosphere before discussing important points. This means that introductory, often totally unrelated topics come first, and important points come toward the end.

(1970, p. 62)

Applegate compares the Japanese reluctance to come to the point to the opposite tendency of Americans who are

concerned—even obsessed—with getting exact information about such matters as times, places, routes, directions, prices, conditions, reasons, and so on. We often come to the point immediately in asking and being asked about such

details.

(1975, p. 278)

Applegate finds evidence in the vocabulary of Americans that they are less tolerant of indirection than many other peoples: "Get to the point," "Out with it," "Don't beat around the bush," or "Let's get down to brass tacks." (1975, p. 280)

Condon and Kurata explain the different styles: direct versus indirect by comparing it to games representative of the culture: chess versus "go".

In English, one is annoyed by talk that "beats around the bush" far better to express some "straight thinking" so that others can "follow the line of reasoning" and quickly "come to the point." Western "lines of argument" usually move as on a chessboard, straightforward until blocked, advancing toward a goal that is clear from the beginning...But not in Japan. Japanese express irritation at such a linear, angular manner. In Japan to be mature in speech is to have those sharp corners smoothed and rounded (*kado ga toreru*). Far better in a discussion to go around and around until all points of view are presented. Then there is no need to come to the point, for it is as if everybody has already determined that by surrounding it, much like isolating territory to win the game of "go".

(1974, p. 78)

Not only do Japanese and Americans prefer their own indirect/direct style, they view the non-native style in a negative way, as evidenced by the following quotes: "The person who begins with the main topic of his visit is often called 'a business-like person'. In traditional Japan, being business-like is thought to be unrefined." (Ogasawara, 1970, p. 59) In contrast: "Foreigners listening to a Japanese often complain that they are irritated by not getting to the point for some time." (Ogasawara, 1970, p. 62)

There are some instances, of course, where the socio-linguistic rules for speaking in American society dictate an indirect rather than a direct approach. As Taylor and Wolfson note, a direct compliment "usually causes the addressee to feel discomfort or embarrassment" and that indirect compliments are more acceptable. (1978, p. 37) As another example, Americans may use an indirect approach when making a request because indirect requests are more polite. (Applegate, 1975, p. 280; Taylor and Wolfson, 1978, p. 37) Taylor and Wolfson go on to say that the use of imperatives for requests is limited to casual conversation with peers. In addition, "would, could, and should" are considered to be "more polite and more deferential" than "will, can, and shall." (1978, p. 37) Lastly, Taylor and Wolfson note that "directness is usually more familiar and less polite than indirectness"; they use questions as an example: direct questions regarding money are rude and those regarding political or religious affiliation are not appropriate. (1978, p. 37)

Norms of Interaction: Criticizing and Interrupting: When looking at criticism and interruption in a Japanese conversation (or rather the lack of it), one must keep in mind that the "Japanese are concerned with 'saving face'...and will do almost everything possible to avoid public embarrassment." (Nishiyama (1973) in Ishii et al., 1978, p. 1) "The Asians concept of 'face' applies not only to their own sense of

honour and dignity, but extends to the 'face' of others." (L. A. Schools, 1974, p. 60) This concept relates to the contrast between the Japanese group orientation and the American individualistic orientation.

The Japanese value harmony and will avoid opposing anyone directly. They are other-directed, in other words. Since the Japanese ordinarily encounter different people in different communication situations, to be other-directed and harmonious in each new situation, they may have to alter their ideas from situation to situation to conform to the ideas of the different people they meet. Talk then tends to be situational.

Americans, on the other hand, are individualistically-oriented. They value openness, frankness, and a healthy confrontation of ideas regardless of the situation or the people they meet even though they may create disharmony and lose the support of others. Their individualness and independence is diametrically opposed to the Japanese's group-centeredness and need for harmony.

(Ishii et al., 1978, p. 9)

This group versus individualistic orientation is recognized by Condon and Kurata as well, who say that for the Japanese: "Identity resides in and arises from, the group. 'Individualism', like equality, is an alien concept, connoting selfishness, egotism, the awkwardness of a mis-fit." (1974, p. 87)

The above mentioned orientation, which also ties in with the concept of 'face', results in the Japanese tendency to avoid direct opinions or criticism in a discussion situation for fear of breaking the harmony of the group or causing the speaker to lose 'face'. Ogasawara gives the following example:

At an academic meeting or a demonstration class of a teaching workshop, few Japanese will give direct opinions or criticisms because they know from experience that it may mean the loss of any friendly relationship between the speaker and the critic. Besides, other people present may be made to feel uncomfortable by the rudeness of the critic, because they realize that the person who is being criticized feels 'shame'.

(1970, p. 59)

Similarly, the harmony of the group would be broken by interrupting the speaker. Though interruption in an American-speaking situation is far from being polite, the practice is considered less rude in America than in Japan.

Once a conversation is underway, an American does not like to be interrupted during his turn speaking. Children are taught this very explicitly. But, of course, Americans *do* interrupt one another. We are more tolerant of interruptions by peers than by juniors or subordinates, and an interruption is less irksome as we trail off or grope for words than when we are just warming up to a subject. In Japan...interruptions are considered ruder and they are correspondingly less frequent.

(Applegate, 1975, p. 277)

The concept of 'face' and the "tradition of respectful silence before elders" influences the Japanese student-teacher relationship. Applegate comments that an American teacher might be disconcerted by the silence of an Oriental student; however:

By this strategy of silence, the student does not show his ignorance by asking questions; he does not lose face by volunteering possibly wrong information, and he does not imply that the teacher's original explanations are unclear by asking for restatements.

(1975, p. 273)

Ogasawara, too, notes that a student may be embarrassed to ask questions because s/he is afraid the question is foolish or that it may trouble the teacher. (1970, p. 62) Berwick makes the following observations about teacher-student relationships:

Japanese students have learned through their entire experience as students and inferiors to remain silent and receive knowledge and direction from their teacher. The status gap between student and teacher seems enormous in the classroom. It allows a clear distinction to be made between the role of teachers and the role of students: teachers speak and dispense perfect knowledge; students listen and absorb it.

(1975, p. 284)

It goes without saying that a Japanese student, hesitant at asking questions, would definitely avoid arguing with the teacher or interrupting him/her.

The implications of the above contrasts in sociolinguistic rules of speaking for the American teaching English conversation in Japan are rather obvious. It is my contention that when learning English a student should also learn the rules of speaking and practice them in the classroom. When a Japanese speaker is speaking Japanese, s/he can preserve the Japanese rules of speaking, but when speaking English, especially when speaking English in America, it would be to the students advantage not only to be aware of the different rules of speaking but to use them too. I am not advocating "Westernizing" the Japanese students, but rather recognizing the need to use a different style of communication for different languages. Thus, in the English conversation classroom, techniques should be used to stimulate conversation, encourage a more direct approach (if the situation calls for it), and provide opportunities for criticism and questioning, i.e. the practice of language functions. All this entails creating a friendly environment where students can be creative and make mistakes and where the teacher steps down from the pedestal to encourage interaction. In this way, whether the Japanese student decides to use American rules of speaking when speaking English or to just recognize but not use them, when the student does do business with Americans (scientific or otherwise) or studies in America, at least the student will anticipate a more orally aggressive interchange, and realize that more will be expected of him/her orally in the classroom. (Ishii et al., 1978, p. 10) If the student should hear argumentation and debate in the classroom, s/he will know that it does not necessarily mean that the harmony of the group has been destroyed. And from the opposite perspective, "Americans interacting with the Japanese should expect more silence and less oral aggressiveness in their dealings." (Ishii et al., 1978, p. 10) This awareness will hopefully alleviate many of the doubts and frustrations of the English speaker teaching conversation in Japan.

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