

【資料】

RELEASING LATENT LANGUAGE:
CONVERSATION TRAINING IN JAPAN'S
JUNIOR COLLEGES

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Introduction

Teaching English conversation to first year students in a Japanese Junior College can only be done well if the teacher understands both the principles of language acquisition and the specific characteristics that the recent graduate of Japanese high schools brings to the English language classroom. In many colleges all over Japan, native speakers who have had little direct experience with first year students in Japanese Junior Colleges are being imported from English speaking countries to teach conversation. If they are to be successful, it is necessary that they understand some of the problems which can arise in the English conversation classroom and some of the approaches which have helped to solve these problems. This paper addresses these issues by describing the 1990 Speaking I class at Seisen Junior College in Shiga Prefecture. The paper describes student characteristics, states a philosophy of instruction, sets out a teaching methodology and discusses evaluation procedures. The curriculum content is presented in an appendix at the end of the paper.

Student Characteristics

The first year students at Seisen Junior College have had intensive English study for at least six years before beginning their college education. They have spent most of this time preparing for rigid English entrance examinations written in high-stress examination settings. Informal testing by an experienced reading and writing teacher indicates that their reading and writing abilities range from a grade 7 to a grade 10 equivalency level in the Oregon and Canadian school systems. Their experience in English conversation, however, is extremely limited. Even though their average age is 18 years old, many of the students had never spoken with a native speaker until

they began their education at Seisen Junior College.

Shiga Prefecture, where most of the students live, is a rural prefecture that has not yet been swept up in the wave of modernization that is changing Japan so quickly. While other parts of Japan are switching from a manufacturing economy to a service economy, Shiga Prefecture is still in the throes of industrial growth. Rural life has been preserved in Shiga. Consequently, the Seisen students are often shy and old-fashioned in their thinking and in their behaviors. They have graduated from a high school where they have received an intense paper-based education in which they have been encouraged to memorize and restate facts. Because their training has seldom included opportunities to ask and respond to questions, to debate the views of the teacher or to engage in oral discussion, they possess few communication skills. In addition, their social relationships are quite immature and are composed of relationship behaviors common to first year students in the American Junior High School.

There is, however, one major difference in the classroom behavior of these two groups of students. While American junior high school students ask questions, volunteer responses and challenge the teacher, the Seisen students do not do so. If a teacher asks a question of the whole class, not one student will raise a hand to volunteer an answer. All students drop and glaze their eyes so that the teacher cannot ask for a response unless she or he knows the students' names. These classroom behaviors present a seemingly impassable barrier to the teaching of conversation skills.

To get beyond the student's unwillingness to talk is difficult, but the Seisen students will respond to warmth and humor if it is given honestly and tenderly. Once the initial emotional and cultural barriers have been broken down, they reveal themselves to be enthusiastic students with a good mastery of vocabulary and of English language structures. When coaxed out of their shyness, they will express themselves creatively in spoken English. The first step, however, is a difficult one.

Philosophy of Instruction

Because of the specific characteristics of the Seisen Junior College students, it is necessary to focus the efforts of the first year

training on the development of communication skills rather than on the development of language skills. Most students have mastered the vocabulary and structure curriculum for the first year program, but they have never used the language in conversation. The language remains virtually latent. The challenge of the first year teacher is to activate this latent language by providing settings in which an information gap forces students to search for and use vocabulary and structures that they have mastered in written English. For this reason, the approach used in first year Junior College instruction is derived from the Communicative Approach. In the Communicative Approach, English is required as a medium of classroom communication, errors are tolerated, and many games are played in small and large groups. Curriculum content is treated as review in teacher-centered presentations.

Teaching Methodology

Instruction in the first year conversation class can be divided into three phases which progressively lead the student from non-participation in conversation to participation in spontaneous conversations which demand mastery of the vocabulary and structures that are outlined in Appendix A. The phases are outlined below.

Phase I - Preparation for Conversation

When first year college students arrive in the English conversation classroom they bring with them classroom habit patterns which are counterproductive to the learning of conversation skills. The most notable of these patterns is a complete unfamiliarity with the idea of volunteering a response. Unlike the students in Western classroom settings, they will not reply to a teacher-posed question. There seems to be a stigma against being noticed so even when the teacher designates a particular student to make a response, the student will reply in as brief a manner as possible. Students often sit with their heads down in order to avoid being asked to give a response.

Another habit pattern which the students bring to the conversation classroom arises from an intense focus on the necessity of

passing paper-based school and employment entrance examinations. The students feel at home if they have a textbook to study and blackboard notes to copy. Their schooling experience has been one of memorizing and restating facts and concepts which are presented in books and by a teacher. They have accumulated little experience at approaching the content of their courses creatively. The very nature of conversation requires the same flexibility and creativity which is discouraged by the Japanese entrance examination system.

A final habit pattern which stands in the way of developing conversation skills is the immature nature of the students' interpersonal relationships. It seems that students lack conversation skills in their native language. Their repertoire of interpersonal interactions includes yelling, squealing, slapping and frequent non-sequiter utterances. These behaviors interrupt true dialogue and indicate that the students have not learned the joy of meaningful interpersonal communication.

In order to correct the above barriers to effective conversation, Phase I focuses on teaching appropriate classroom behavior, creating a safe place for the students to experiment with language, and teaching the basic communication skills of listening to a statement, responding to that statement, asking related questions, and making noises of affirmation and exclamation. Phase I is designed to break down counter-productive habit patterns that the students have learned in their previous school experiences. The methods and games which are summarized below are, at first glance, very childlike. This is intentional, as their purpose is to restructure the classroom behavior of the students.

A. Restructuring Classroom Behavior

1. Draw a configuration of classroom furniture on the blackboard which is different from the usual classroom setting. Have students come to the front of the classroom and give other students English instructions which will result in the classroom furniture arrangement matching the configuration in the drawing.
2. Place all furniture to the sides of the classroom and have the students stand or sit in a circle.

- 3 . Play child-like relay games as outlined in W. R. Lee's *Language Teaching Games and Contests*.
- 4 . Engage in restructuring activities as outlined in Mary Christison and Sharron Bassano's *Look Who's Talking: A Guide to the Development of Successful Conversation Groups in Intermediate and Advanced E.S.L. Classrooms*. (Content must be adapted for beginning class.)

The activities above result in stripping the students of the classroom setting which supports their non-participation behavior and forces them to develop new strategies to survive in the classroom. The initial disorientation and confusion which is created by these activities creates a convenient gap into which classroom behaviors more conducive to learning conversation skills can be injected. It also creates an initial dependency upon the teacher which results in the formation of a teacher-student relationship in which communication has been elevated from just another subject to the status of a survival skill.

If the students are to volunteer responses, engage in spontaneous use of language, interact with each other in English and risk being noticed by the group, a safe environment must be created by the teacher. Language learning involves repeated risk-taking in front of others, in this case, a foreign teacher and a very critical peer group. Students have learned in elementary and middle school that it is dangerous to stand out in the group. Survey research shows that it is usually those students who are different that are the victims of the brutal practice of peer bullying. The interpersonal space that exists within the classroom group and between the teacher and the students has to be a safe place in which to experiment with new behavior.

Takeo Doi, a Japanese psychoanalyst who transformed psychiatric case-taking in Japan in the 1970's by insisting on taking notes in Japanese rather than in the technical jargon of Freudian psychoanalysis, was impressed by the fact that there is a word in the Japanese language which has no equivalent in other languages. From this observation, he postulated a unique characteristic of the Japanese psyche which is created and supported by unique character-

istics of Japanese society. This word, "amae", denotes the feeling of the child at the loving mother's breast and implies that Japanese children are raised with the assumption that, as long as one is in her in-group, indulgence in neediness and self-indulgent behavior can be taken for granted. For the Japanese, the in-group world is a safe place to be. When one is placed outside of this in-group, however, the world becomes dangerous and a protective hostility may arise.

Doi's findings have strong implications for the teaching practices of native speakers in the English conversation classroom. Simply by being the foreigner around whom the classroom is gathered, the teacher prevents the class members from developing into an in-group. By understanding the dynamics of "amae" and by demonstrating to the students that these dynamics are operating in the classroom setting, the teacher can create an in-group, and therefore, a safe place for the students to learn and practise new language skills.

"Amae" implies loving tolerance of misbehavior combined with firm insistence on the desired behavior. Students often test their environment by engaging in behaviors that they recognize as undesirable from the teacher's point of view. A subtle passive resistance to learning can develop in the classroom and can be quite upsetting to a teacher who is used to enthusiastic and energetic language learners. The dynamics of "amae" demand that the teacher demonstrate concern over the students' lack of learning while making an appeal to the students' sense of group membership. As it becomes apparent that passive resistance is preventing language learning, intervention becomes necessary.

B. Group Formation

This intervention can take the form of having the students sit in a circle where they have to face each other and the teacher. The teacher must then ask the question, "What do you want from this group?" over and over again. Initially students will not respond, but as time passes a tension will build up. It is important for the teacher not do anything to relieve this tension in any way. This type of meeting can be very stressful, but if it results in the students answering the question, "What do you want from this group?" they will have acknowledged the existence of a group, of which the

teacher is the leader. An in-group will have begun to develop in the classroom setting.

This group can be strengthened with group activities drawn from the lighter encounter activities developed in the human potential movement on the West Coast of the United States in the 1960's and in the field of dance and movement therapy. While it is best for the teacher to have a large repertoire of these kinds of activities to choose from, the following activities can be used both to reinforce language skills and to solidify the development of the in-group.

- 1 . Students mill about in random patterns obeying instructions to run, walk, hop, go fast, go slow, walk depressed, walk happy, walk young, walk old, stop etc. Initially the teacher gives the instructions but eventually the students do so.
- 2 . Students mill about as above until they are told to stop. Then they follow instructions to touch someone's shoulder, touch someone's foot, touch someone's back with your elbow etc. Before milling is resumed, students must get to know one thing about their partner by asking them a question in English.
- 3 . Students form a circle. One student wears a blindfold while walking. The other students give the students verbal directions in English and protect the blindfolded student from bumping into anything or anyone. This exercise builds group trust.
- 4 . Students form a circle. One student gets in the center of the circle and mimes a physical action. Other students first mimic the action and then name it. Conversation drill is then added.
- 5 . Students form a circle and join hands. Without releasing hands, students walk through each other's arms until they are tied up in one huge group knot. When they cannot move anymore, the teacher instructs the students to ask the person to their right a question in English. The group is then instructed to untie the knot without releasing hands.

- 6 . After students have played charades in small groups, the teacher instructs them to play charades in a large group. This activity encourages students to volunteer responses and to guess.

The above activities are a small selection of possible activities that the teacher can introduce. Any activity where the students must act as a group to solve a problem or to create an effect will strengthen the formation of the group. Even simple activities such as clapping for the performance of a fellow student has a profound psychological effect on the group. Once this group is formed, students will feel free to experiment with new language and with new cultural behaviors. As the childlike nature of these activities produces a positive regression to the students' kindergarten and elementary school experiences, feelings dependent upon the existence of "amae" will naturally evolve. Inhibitions developed in adolescence and supported by a fear of foreigners will drop away. It is at this point that Phase II of language instruction begins.

Phase II Releasing Latent Language

Most of the language skills outlined in Appendix A have been mastered by the students prior to their arrival in the first year college program. It is unlikely, however, that many of the students will have used these skills in conversation. Once inhibitions to practising conversation skills have been minimized in Phase I, it is the task of the English conversation teacher to provide experiences which release latent language.

There are many effective ways to do this and there are many excellent materials available. One recommendation that applies to first year college students, particularly in Japan, is to avoid using a textbook which the students follow from day to day. This method is too similar to their previous language instructional experiences and could undo all the destructuring accomplished in Phase I. It is better to use an overhead projector, paper hand-outs and blackboard notes for the presentation of vocabulary and structures. It is absolutely necessary to break down the students' dependency on rote memorization of paper-based materials. Appendix B lists materials that have

proven to be effective.

In Phase II conversation patterns studied from textbooks which they used in high school are reintroduced. An effective method of helping the students to avoid engaging in rote memorization is to use hand puppets. This technique is consistent with the positive regression the was encouraged by Phase I.

Hand puppets provide an interesting and engaging way to teach conversation patterns and English expressions. Characters who demonstrate the skills required for true dialogue can be developed. Initially, these characters engage in conversations which are created by the instructor but, eventually, students can help to develop the characters of the puppets, the relationships amongst the puppet characters and the gestural and language interactions in which the puppet characters engage. In this way, not only language skills, but also cultural differences, issues of mature and immature behavior, values clarification and personal goal setting can be addressed in the English conversation classroom.

The final step in Phase II involves the students using the hand puppets to develop a short play with the puppet characters. Students get into small groups and develop story lines and resultant interactions and conversations amongst the puppet characters. Towards the end of Phase II the video camera is introduced and by the end of Phase II students are performing, recording and criticising the puppet plays that they produce. Having developed the skills of working in a group with minimal teacher interference, of producing creative conversations, of making decisions about the life styles and values of the puppet characters, and of using their voices to give the English language meaningful expression, the students are ready for Phase III of instruction.

Phase III - Complex Spontaneous Conversation

In the final phase of the Seisen's first year conversation program, students are required to have spontaneous conversations about serious issues such as Japanese culture and history, environmental problems, the education system etc. This will require the introduction of new vocabulary and sentence structures and will therefore go

beyond Phase II's goal of releasing latent language. This work will continue in the second year program and is only presented as a brief introduction in the first year class.

By the time students are ready for Phase III, they have developed the skills of working in pairs or small groups, asking for vocabulary and assistance with sentence formation, and developing conversations which have continuity and meaning. A typical assignment in Phase III is as follows:

In diads or triads, construct a conversation between two or three Americans who meet on an airplane after a two month visit to Japan. Have the characters greet each other, find out where the other lives and how long they were in Japan. After the characters become acquainted, have them discuss some aspects of Japanese culture or history that they learned about while they were in Japan. The conversation should be five to ten minutes long and must end in a natural way. Your conversation will be performed on video tape and must be memorized.

This assignment can take up to two or three class periods to complete as the students will need to spend a lot of time working on it. The role of the teacher while the students are working in small groups is to circulate from group to group making suggestions which deepen the level of conversation, helping students who are stuck, and where possible, supplying vocabulary and sentence patterns. When it is time for the role plays to be performed the teacher should assist the students with setting the stage for the role play.

The final stage of Phase III involves the spontaneous production of creative conversation. Presented with a setting, two or three characters and a theme, the students, after very brief consultation, must have a five to seven minute conversation in front of the video camera. The conversation is then played back and after the students' giggles are exhausted, the teacher engages in a serious feed-back session on student performance. As students will be over-engaging in self criticism, the teacher feedback should be limited to praise, encouragement and positive suggestion.

This concludes the section on Teaching Methodology. If the

method is followed, some real changes in student behavior will take place. Whereas initial student behavior involved non-participation in classroom activity, and in some cases, behavior that undermined the success of the students, the final behavior involves a high level of participation, commitment to learning, and enjoyment. Conversation can only be learned if students are required to participate in both real and imaginary conversations. It is the goal of the teaching methodology outlined here to provide a setting where these conversations can take place.

EValuation of Students

In order to avoid the reemergence of dependence upon paper-based learning that was developed during the students' middle and high school training, it is important to avoid, as much as possible, paper-based tests. At Seisen Junior College the grading system requires the teacher to assign a letter grade to the students' performance. In the first year program, this letter grade is based on the following factors: attendance; peer evaluation of a prepared conversation; self-evaluation of a video-taped playback of a prepared conversation; teacher evaluation of classroom conversations; teacher evaluation of a prepared conversation; and teacher evaluation of a 1 : 1 interview type conversation test.

Ultimately, the system of grading is derived from the "holistic evaluation" method approved in 1989 by the General Educational Development Consultants in the United States. This evaluation method involves the teacher weighing the many factors of student performance and then assigning a grade from a "gut feeling". The method assumes both competence and ethical behavior on the part of the teacher. It is particularly valuable in the English conversation classroom in a Japanese college's first year program because it frees the students from a rigid idea about what success in learning means.

Conclusion

While the above course description at Seisen Junior College represents little other than the teaching experiences of the author of this paper, the ideas and method presented are based on some enduring principles of language learning theory and on some acute observa-

tions about the students in a first year college English conversation class in Japan. The premise underlying all the concepts can be stated as follows: While first year college students in Japanese Junior Colleges have mastered the curriculum content of the English language classroom, they have had little opportunity to practise their language skills in a simulated or real conversation setting. The most important role of the teacher of a first year English conversation class is to provide settings where conversation can freely take place. The ideas here are simply ways of doing that. It is hoped that future teachers will utilize the principles outlined and demonstrated in this paper to develop their own approaches to the facilitation of students' conversational activities.

Appendix A

Seisen Junior College English Department
Curriculum Guide for Speaking 1

Learning Objectives

1 . VOCABULARY

A . Light Conversation

- i. Greetings and language of courtesy.
- ii. Weather, days of the week, months, time etc.
- iii. Conversation fillers.

B . Functional Conversation

- i. Food and drink.
- ii. Body parts and actions.
- iii. Clothing (names, colour, sizes etc.).
- iv. Following classroom directions.
- v. Names of city locations.
- vi. Asking, understanding and giving directions.
- vii. Transportation.
- viii. Number and money systems in dollars and yen.
- ix. Emotions, feelings and states of need.
- x. Shopping.
- ix. Room and hotel rental.

C . Social Conversation

- i. Family systems and relationships.
- ii. Occupations.
- iii. Entertainment.
- iv. Description of action in the past.
- v. Descriptions of intentions for the future.
- vi. Japanese culture conversations.

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vii. Everyday activities.

2 . LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

A . Verbs

- i. Simple present, past and future.
- ii. Present Progressive and past progressive of regular verbs.
- iii. Forms for affirmative and negative statements and questions.
- iv. Auxillary verbs: do, have, go.
- v. Present perfect with simple past tense regular verbs and frequently used irregular verbs.

B . Prepositions

- i. Continual use.

C . Nouns

- i. Common and proper nouns.
- ii. Regular and irregular plurals.
- iii. Countable and uncountable nouns with qualifiers.
- iv. Concrete nouns.
- v. Possessive nouns with 's.

D . Pronouns

- i. Subject pronouns.
- ii. Object pronouns.
- iii. Demonstrative pronouns.
- iv. Possessive pronouns.

E . Adjectives

- i. Common adjectives.
- ii. Antonym pairs.

- iii. Comparative and superlative forms.
- iv. Noun modifiers and predicate adjectives.

F. Adverbs

- i. Frequency and time.
- ii. Place.

G. Function Words

- i. Articles.
- ii. Co-ordinate conjunctions.
- iii. Subordinate conjunctions of time and causation.

H. Question Forms

- i. "Wh" forms.
- ii. How forms.
- iii. Subject/verb inversion forms.

I. Comprehension

- i. Basic information, questions and statements.
- ii. Negative expressions.
- iii. Simple commands.
- iv. Two part commands.
- v. Tag endings.

Appendix B

Materials Consulted

I. Presentation and Review of Learning Objectives

A New Start: A Functional Course in Basic Spoken English and Survival Literacy, Linda Mrowicki and Peter Furnborough. Heinemann Educational Books, New Hampshire, 1982.

English For Communication, Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1988.

English Pronunciation Exercises for Japanese Students, Harriette Gordon Grate, Regents Publishing Company, New York, 1974.

Everyday English, Linda Shurer. Alemany Press, California, 1980.

Photo Dictionary, Marylyn S. Rosenthal and Daniel B. Freeman. Longman Inc., New York, 1987.

Side by Side: English Through Guided Conversations, Steven J. Molinsky and Bill Bliss. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1983.

Story Squares: Fluency in English as a Second Language, Phillip L. Knowles and Rught A. Sasaki. Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1980.

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Communication Starters and Other Activities for the ESL Classroom, Judy Winn Bell Olsen. Allemany Press, California, 1977.

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sity Press, Hongkong, 1979.

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III. Principles of Language Learning

Awareness Is, John O. Stevens. The Real People Press, California, 1964.

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