

RECONSTRUCTION OF JAPANESE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF GRAMMAR AND COMMUNICATION IN THE MEISEI SUMMER SCHOOL PROJECT (MSSP)

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Abstract: *In this paper is investigated the way of teaching English into an integrative manner by focusing on both grammar and communication, especially oral communication, in one English class of Japanese students. Furthermore, it was investigated how such types of teaching influence Japanese students' perception of English, their target language. One topic of controversy is whether or not Japanese junior high or high school teachers should teach English in the medium of English. For collecting data were employed research techniques such as participatory observation, video recording, and informal interview to collect related data from the one junior high school student, and also from the Meisei University students and international volunteers who managed the English classes.*

Key words: *teaching English, grammar, communication, Meisei University.*

1. Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (MEXT) (2008) issued new teaching guidelines in 2008. In the guidelines, it states that English teachers should teach their classes focusing on nurturing “students’ basic communication abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, deepening their understanding of language and culture and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages” (MEXT, 2008, p.1). Nevertheless, the English classes I observed during my Japanese municipal junior high school in 2013 were not focusing on English communication. They spent most of their class time on teaching new English vocabulary (using flash cards), explaining grammatical forms, translating English sentences, reading and practicing pronunciation at a phrase or sentence level. They did not spend much time on communication activities. Consistent to the above experience I had in the junior high

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school, a study by Benesse Educational Research and Development Center (2008), which was conducted from the viewpoint of Japanese English teachers, shows that many Japanese English teachers tend to spend much time teaching reading, pronunciation and also grammar explanation. In addition, it was found that they spend much less time for communication activities including game activities. It could be said that today's English education in Japan still tends to focus on English grammar and reading. While the MEXT suggests that English teachers should focus on nurturing the students' English communication abilities, the situation seems to remain unchanged.

Another survey conducted from the viewpoint of Japanese students by Benesse (2009), shows that a lot of students have strong negative perceptions of English grammar. In addition, it was found in the study that students tend to focus on "getting a good score on a test" and "passing the high school entrance examination" as their primary objectives of learning English. To enter high school in Japan, students have to take several examination subjects including English. In the English entrance examination, students are required to have skills or knowledge of English grammar, reading, writing and also listening. However, English speaking skills are not necessary to achieve a high score. In such an educational system, students will not be able to focus on oral English communication. There are great discrepancies between MEXT's policies and current realities of English education in Japan. Nowadays, Japanese English teachers face a dilemma: whether to focus on grammatical items or oral communication. This is because it is impossible for them to teach every English skill in the limited class time.

In this study, I investigate how we can teach English integrative manner by focusing on both grammar and communication, especially oral communication, in one English class. Furthermore, I would like to investigate how such types of teaching influence Japanese students' perception of English, their target language. To explore this, I set out two research questions.

1. What factors help teachers teach English grammar and communication in an integrative manner?
2. How are Japanese junior high school students' perceptions of English grammar and of English communication reconstructed through taking both the communicative English and English grammar classes?

2. Conceptual Framework

Three concepts have been employed to scaffold this study. They are communicative competence, three aspects of grammar, and the Communication - Oriented Grammar Instruction Model.

2.1. Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was developed by Chomsky (1965), Hymes (1972), Canale & Swain (1980), Canale (1983), Bachman (1990), and also Bachman & Palmer (1996) in the last four decades. Canale & Swain (1980) indicated that competence consists of three different types of competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Three years later, Canale (1983) developed the concept further, suggesting that communicative competence consists of four different types of competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse

competence, and strategic competence. The concept of communicative competence indicates that grammatical competence, as well as the other types of competence, is a significant factor for people to engage in communication with others.

Bachman (1990), and also Bachman & Palmer (1996) developed further Canale (1983)'s concept of communicative competence. Bachman (1990) uses the term communicative language ability (CLA) rather than communicative competence in discussing what is needed to communicate effectively. He insists that "Communicative language ability (CLA) can be described as consisting of both knowledge or competence, and the capacity for implementing, or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualized communicative language use" (Bachman, 1990, p. 81). Bachman (1990) indicates with the concept that to communicate effectively in a language, people need to use it in an appropriate manner. He also states that CLA consists of different types of competences such as textual competence, illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence in addition to grammatical competence. These theorists repeatedly point out that grammatical competence is necessary for effective communication or language use.

2.2. The Three Aspects of Grammar

The three aspects of grammar introduced by Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman in 1999 explain how target language learners correctly or appropriately use the grammatical elements in language communication. They state that grammar has three aspects, 'form', 'meaning', and 'use' (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). They further explain that the need of attending to how the language is formed (accuracy), what it means (meaningfulness), and when / why it is used (appropriateness) function together. The concept indicates that grammar is not just for memorizing the whole, systematically. Language users are required to use the knowledge of grammar in practical language communication and need the ability to understand that the grammar is used under different situations or contexts.

2.3. The Communication-Oriented Grammar Instruction Model

In search of a method focusing both on English grammar and communication, Long (1991, 1998) suggested 'Focus on Form', which integrates grammar instruction and communicative language teaching. This teaching methodology asserts that through lessons that mainly focuses on meaning and communication, students come to pay attention to linguistic elements such as grammatical structures and to pragmatic patterns in the context. Long introduced some possibilities including the aspect of grammar and communication to practice that style of teaching.

Recently, another communication-oriented grammar instruction method was presented by Tanaka and Tanaka (2014) that has been shown to be applicable to English education in Japanese EFL contexts. They pointed out that there are three problems which need to be solved in the current English education in Japan: Some teachers focus too much on communication in their lessons; conversely, other teachers focus too much on grammar; many of the teachers cannot figure out how to prioritize in their grammar instructions. To solve these problems, Tanaka and Tanaka (2014) suggested a range of techniques to teach both grammar and communication effectively. Of those techniques, I would like to present four techniques that relate to the present study.

Tanaka and Tanaka (2014) introduce many techniques to teach English communication and grammar in an integrative manner. In this study, I investigated the teaching of English grammar and communication in an integrative manner in an English educational project, named Meisei Summer School Project (MSSP), taking place at Meisei University in Japan. For that reason, I decided to use Tanaka and Tanaka (2014)'s model as a framework for the data analysis.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection Site and Participants

I collected data at Meisei Summer School Project (MSSP) in 2014. In the MSSP, there were a variety of classes. However, this study focuses on two classes, which are communicative English and English grammar classes. The MSSP, which consists of both types, is managed by Japanese undergraduate students of Meisei University. In the case of the communicative English class, Japanese undergraduates of different year-levels team up with international volunteers from both English and Non-English speaking countries and collaboratively teach English to elementary and junior high school students. In the preparation period, they make class schedules, lesson plans and teaching materials, and rehearse their lessons in their target language, English. Many of the undergraduates do not have teaching experience or experiences of participating in the MSSP. Most of them are not planning to become English teachers, but they have a strong desire to improve their English skills through the task of managing English classes. The undergraduate students teach their lessons in English.

On the other hand, in the English grammar class, Japanese undergraduates of different year-levels taught their lessons for one week in their and their students' mother tongue, Japanese. The curriculum was designed for junior high school students. This class started to be offered in the MSSP in 2014. Therefore, none of the undergraduates had any experiences of participating in such a class. Within the two types of classes, I collected data focusing on four Japanese junior high school students who took both of the two classes in the morning and the afternoon for one week. However, in this article, I focus on one Japanese junior high school student, Yūto (see Table 1).

Participants' Information

Table 1

Name	Junior high school grade	Sex	Test in practical English proficiency (the EIKEN grades)	English learning experiences
Yūto	Second grade	Male	EIKEN third grade	Cram school (in the summer of 2014) English conversation school (since when he was in kindergarden) MSSP's communicative English class (2013-2014) MSSP's English grammar class (2014)

Note. EIKEN third grade: This level is aimed at Japanese junior high school graduates (EIKEN, 2015, April, 14th, <http://www.eiken.or.jp/eiken/en/grades/>).

3.2. Data Collection Methods

I adopted different research techniques such as participatory observation, video recording, and informal interview to collect related data from the one junior high school student, and also from the Meisei university students and international volunteers who managed the English classes. The data was collected for one week between August 4 and August 9, 2014. I conducted informal interviews with the student. In the interviews, I asked the junior high school students how their perceptions of English were reconstructed through taking such English courses in the MSSP, how they communicated with international volunteers in English, and how they participated in the MSSP's class activities or events.

Additional data was collected by participatory observation, such as taking field-notes. I actually attended all lessons of the two types of classes and observed the junior high school students' behaviors or attitudes during each activity. In both of the classes, I also conducted participatory observation with the focus on the student teachers in charge of the classes. I closely observed how the teachers (including international volunteers) interacted with their students, and also their actions, behavior as well as their attitude during their lessons and break time.

3.3. Data Analysis

I used two research questions to guide this research. In addition, My analysis focused on one communicative English class's teaching styles which are one communicative English class and one English grammar class. However, in this paper, I present one communicative English class's teaching style at the MSSP, and I illustrate that how the Japanese junior high school student's perception of English was reconstructed through taking the communicative English as well as English grammar classes at the MSSP.

3.4. Communicative English Class's Teaching Style in the MSSP

The communicative English class teaches the language in the medium of English. Through analysing collected data in this class, I recognized some factors that promoted their teaching of English focusing both on grammar and communication. One factor was the structure of their lessons. Each lesson was structured in three steps, 'introduction and practice', 'individual check' and 'communicative activity' (see Table 2).

Lesson Structure

Table 2

Step.1 Introduction and Practice
Teachers (including international volunteers) show an example of lesson's content (e.g. conversation patterns) by showing the conversations. After the introduction, teachers make students repeat and practice the whole key words and sentences used in the conversation patterns with introduction.
Step.2 Individual Check
Teachers individually check if their students understand the meanings of the key words or sentences and also if they can properly use them.

Step.3 Communicative Activity
Demonstration:
Teachers demonstrate what students have to do in the communicative activity in front of the students to make them understand how they can engage themselves in the activity.
Working on the communicative activity:
Students actually work on the activity, and teachers encourage their students to participate in the communicative activities.

In the MSSP's communicative English class, teachers introduced some English words, sentence forms and conversation patterns to students at the beginning. The steps of 'introduction and practice', 'individual checking' and 'demonstration', helped students move smoothly on the last communicative English activity and enabled their active participation. In addition, each of the steps facilitated the students' learning grammatical items and their practice of using the grammatical items in conversations.

At the stage of 'introduction and practice' and 'demonstration for the stage of communicative activity', the findings indicate that grammatical items, sentence forms or conversation patterns can be taught in the medium of English. The main feature of the MSSP's communicative English class is demonstrating how to use the patterns, not explaining them. When the teachers introduced English words, they created a conversational setting inside the classroom and showed to their students how to use the English words. In addition, they properly used gestures, picture cards consisting of illustrations and English words, and music to facilitate the students' understanding of the new items. These were used to practice the patterns in each lesson of the class. For example, in the lesson of the airplane, teachers created an actual conversational setting (in the airplane) inside the classroom, rearranging the desks and chairs within the classroom. One teacher took the role of a flight attendant and the other teachers were the passengers. They introduced the conversation in the setting and showed how they can create the conversation. Through the stage of introduction and practice, students were able to realize how the sentence forms. Grammatical expressions were used in the conversation functioning in real life settings (see Excerpt 1).

Excerpt 1

Communicative English Class Case of an Airplane Cabin

Main teacher: Please imagine. You are in the airplane, ok?

Pin Pon Pan Po~n!

Teacher A (= flight attendant): (With the gesturing of carry a food cart)

Karakarakara, I'm a flight attendant.

Teacher B (=passenger): Excuse me.

Teacher A: Hi.

Teacher B: I want something to drink.

Main teacher: What would you like?

Teacher B: Milk, please.

Teacher A: Beer?

Teacher B: Milk, please.

Teacher A: Could you say it again?

Teacher B: Milk, milk please.

Teacher A: Oh, Milk. Ok. (This teacher makes a gesture of pouring a cup of apple juice.) Here you are.

Teacher B: Thank you.

(duration)

Teacher B: Repeat after me, Excuse me, I want something to drink. (Repeating twice)

Teachers: 3, 2, 1.

Students: Excuse me, I want something to drink. (Repeating twice)

Teacher A: Repeat after me, what would you like? (Repeating twice)

Students: What would you like? (Repeating twice)

Teacher B: Coke, please. (Repeating twice)

Students: Coke, please. (Repeating twice)

Note. Observation data 1, Team November, August, 5, 2014)

This type of introduction and practice was conducted by involving all of the other teachers. In addition, teachers created the real life setting (in an airplane cabin), inside the classroom. In Tanaka and Tanaka's (2014) model, grammar and communication are taught in four steps, 'introduction', 'explaining', 'practice' and 'communicative activity'. For the second steps, 'explanation', they suggest some techniques to explain grammatical items. For example, using a simple example sentence, comparing the already learned grammar with the new grammar (e.g., comparing past tense with present perfect tense), using figures and illustrations and explaining grammatical items to help the activity after the explanation (Tanaka & Tanaka, 2014, p.101). However, the 'introduction and practice' of MSSP's communicative English class was found to be much simpler. Excerpt 1 indicates that teachers did not explain the grammatical items or sentence forms in detail to students. Teachers only used picture cards (including illustration and an English word) and demonstrated the conversation within the settings to help them become self-aware of how each of the grammatical items or sentence forms can be used in conversations. This Excerpt 1 indicates that showing and performing how to use grammatical items, sentences and conversation patterns in the communicative settings can substitute for all the techniques on explanation suggested by Tanaka and Tanaka (2014).

3.5. Perceptions of English Grammar and Communication

In this section, how the Japanese junior high school student's perception of English is reconstructed through taking grammar and communication courses is described. As mentioned earlier, related data were collected from one Japanese junior high school students, Yūto.

Yūto's Background

Yūto was a second grade junior high school student. This was the second time (2013 - 2014) he participated in the communicative English class, and this was his first time to take English grammar class in 2014. He had belonged to an English conversation class since he was a kindergartener until he became a sixth grader in elementary school. He learned basic English vocabulary and conversation in the English conversation class. Yūto developed a positive perception of English through these learning experiences.

Regarding communicating in English, he enjoyed the challenge because it made him glad when his feelings got through to foreigners. However, Yūto had a negative perception of English grammar. In his public junior high school, his English teacher's teaching was mostly based on textbook and rote-learning. His teacher made him and the other students memorize English words and passages and the teacher taught them just following the textbook. According to Yuto, he had never, since he was an elementary school student, learned English grammar. Therefore, through taking the class, he felt that English was bookish and his negative perception of English grammar was constructed.

Yūto's Perception of English after Taking the Communicative English and the English Grammar Classes in the MSSP

While I observed the communicative English class for the whole week during the project, I occasionally recognized the scenes in which Yūto spoke Japanese to an international volunteer, Kevin during the lessons and break time. The following is one such scene (see Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2

Encounter between Yūto and Kevin

In the lesson of 'Immigration check', the students were writing their own individual information (e.g. his or her full name, nationality, birthday, sex, and signature) in a passport created with paper. Then, the international volunteer, Kevin, spoke to Yūto and asked something. After that, Yūto said, "*Kādo ni kakanainndesuka?* [Do you not write (your information) on your card?]" to Kevin in Japanese. Kevin tried to understand what Yūto said.

Note. Observation data 2, Yūto, 5, August, 2014

Yūto had an experience of English communication because he had belonged to an English conversation class since he was in kindergarten until becoming a sixth grader. Nevertheless, why did he speak in this way to Kevin who cannot speak any Japanese? About this encounter, Yūto commented in an interview:

Excerpt 3

Interview Data 1 Yūto

Interviewer: You were speaking Japanese to Kevin at first. He is Canadian. Why was that?

Yūto: Well, I did not know how to talk well. Uh, I don't know how to start speaking English. It is like a little difficult to talk to them.

Interviewer: So, you do not know how to start a conversation?

Yūto: No, I don't.

Note. Interview data.1, Yūto, 9, August, 2014

In the lessons of the MSSP's communicative English class, he was able to participate actively in communicative activities because he received a lot of scaffolding in the form of hints from the teachers in the medium of conversation sheets and other materials attached to the white board in front of the classroom. Nevertheless, when he was faced

with an impromptu conversation with the international volunteer in English without such scaffolding, he was not able to figure out how to start the conversation and keep it going.

As mentioned above, Yūto spoke Japanese to the international volunteer with no Japanese-language proficiency. However, after four days of the MSSP's communicative English class, he utilized the grammatical item, 'infinitive', which he learned in the English grammar class, to communicate with the international volunteer as was observed below:

Excerpt 4

Encounter between Yūto and Kevin

During a break time of the communicative English class, students who are boys were playing with an international volunteer who is Kevin in the classroom. Then, Yūto tried talking with Kevin and Yūto said "You..., You want to be a *kabinsei chōsei shōkōgun* to Kevin, This word means 'stomachache' in Japanese. Then, they laughed with each other.

Note. Observation data 3, Yūto, 7, August, 2014.

Why did Yūto use the word, "*kabinsei chōsei shōkōgun*"? In this class, the international volunteer, Kevin, usually said "*kabinsei chōsei shōkōgun*" to students to show that he could speak difficult Japanese words or expressions. Therefore, Yūto imitated his Japanese to get a chance to talk with him using the Japanese expression. In addition, before he tried talking with the international volunteer, he learned the grammatical form, 'want to be~', in the lesson of 'infinitive' in English grammar class. Observation data 4 indicates that Yūto tried to use the grammatical item to communicate with the international volunteer. This behavior is also found in his interview data (see interview data 2).

Excerpt 5

Interview Data 2 Yūto

Yūto: I thought that I can speak English utilizing grammar.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Yūto: I realized that I'm able to use new (English) expressions having new knowledge of grammar.

Note. Interview data 2, Yūto, 9, August, 2014

We can assume from the above quotation that his negative perception of English grammar was reconstructed into a more positive one. He had felt that English grammar was bookish and stiff. However, through taking both of the classes, Yūto realized that English grammar is useful to communicate in English.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study is an analysis of how English teachers can teach English focusing both on communication and grammar, and also how Japanese junior school students' perceptions of English were reconstructed through taking the communicative English class and English grammar class in the MSSP where the teaching is done in the medium of English and Japanese, respectively. The results from my data analysis have implications for

Japanese English education of high schools and junior high schools. In this section, the relationship of the findings to recent research is discussed and how the findings suggest further research is presented.

Recently, one topic of controversy is whether or not Japanese junior high or high school teachers should teach English in the medium of English. Opponents assert that it is too difficult for Japanese teachers to explain English grammatical items and terminologies only in English. They also insist that it would be difficult for students to understand them (Narita, 2013; Shibata & Yokota, 2014). However, the data of MSSP's communicative English class showed that the undergraduates whose English abilities are at a rudimentary level were able to teach English - only in English - collaborating with their teammates including some international volunteers. When the teachers introduced English words and conversation patterns together with how to use them in the communicative activity, they properly used gestures, picture cards and also utilized music to facilitate the students' understanding of the new items. In addition, they created conversational settings inside the classroom and demonstrated how to use the English words, conversation patterns introduced within the settings. Through their introduction and demonstration, students were able to realize that how the grammatical forms can be used in real life settings. The findings imply that Japanese teachers of English do not necessarily need to explain everything about the grammatical items or the ways of using them. They can just demonstrate them. That way, Japanese teachers would be able to manage their English classes even through the medium of English with less burden.

Through the analysis of the collected data from Yūto, I have discovered one point in common. All of the Japanese junior high school students' negative perceptions of English grammar were attributed to their past English learning experience at junior high school. Yūto pointed out in his interviews that the gap between English education of their past English learning experience at the language school or elementary school, and junior high school. In Japan, elementary school teachers do not focus much on grammar when they teach English to their students. Rather, they spend much time on teaching the beginning level of English vocabulary and conversation patterns in fun ways, sometimes utilizing music and other media. Therefore, when students enter junior high school, they faced the difficulty of learning English grammar. Thus, to reduce junior high school students' negative perceptions of English grammar, I suggest that junior high school teachers spend more time on teaching grammar not for passing exams but for different communicative purposes.

In addition, Yūto's data indicated that those students did not know how to talk and how to start and develop an English conversation with the international volunteers in the social context of the MSSP even though they had been going to English conversation school for years. Especially, in the case of Yūto, he frequently spoke Japanese to international volunteers who hardly can speak that language. He was not able to deal with the actual English conversations without hints or scaffolding of teaching materials (e.g. the English conversation sheet attached to the white board) or the teachers in the MSSP's communicative English class. The data indicated that his behavior of speaking Japanese to the non-Japanese speaker is related to his junior high school's English-learning experiences that are textbook-oriented and promotes rote learning. Therefore, when international volunteers' ways of developing their conversations do not follow the patterns introduced in their school textbooks, the Japanese junior high school students cannot participate actively in the conversations. In addition, in the MSSP's

communicative English classes, they teach an English conversation, but they are unable to teach 'authentic' English conversation. In the MSSP, students practiced how to communicate in English with international volunteers. However, they did so following one conversation pattern introduced in the lesson. The students did not have much chance to improvise their messages and also to practice reacting to their interlocutors' unexpected questions within the communicative setting. I suggest that the MSSP also provide such opportunities for the students.

Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics are going to be held in 2020. In preparation for the Olympics, MEXT (2013, 2014) issued a new program aiming at the English educational reform to deal with globalization. In the program, it mentions that Japanese junior high school and high school English teachers need to teach English in the medium of English in their English classes. However, teachers need to pay attention to some students who have some difficulties to be taught only in English. Therefore, I assert that teachers also need to deepen their understanding of their students' backgrounds such as their English learning experiences. In addition, there is a question whether certain age groups of students respond better to English taught in English in contrast to those age groups who would find it too difficult.

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