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# A Critical Report on ETJ Teacher-Training Course, Spring 2002

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## Abstract

A one-day course of ETJ (English Teachers in Japan) was held, in which four English teachers presented their ideas about teaching Japanese students: "Reading Skill: Methods and Applications" by Dr. Rob Waring, "Classic Classroom Activities" by Maurice Jamall, "Interactive Speaking and Writing Activities" by Curtis Kelly, and "Motivation Techniques" by David Paul. All their ideas derive from their classroom research and trial-and error experience in Japan. Unlike other internationally-recognized training courses in which most of the theories and methodology come out of European or North American teaching situations, the presenters' interests are especially in Japan in this course, so the Japanese English teachers have a lot to gain through participating in the course and analyzing each presentation. In this thesis, I would like to report their presentations and then analyze their ideas according to my own experience.

**Key words:** English, Actiuity, Motivation

## 要 旨

日本在住の英語のネイティブスピーカーの英語教師たちの学会であるETJ(English Teachers in Japan)による、講演会が行われた。4人の講演者がそれぞれ、「リーディング技法」、「英語授業における典型的な会話活動」、「スピーキング活動とライティング活動の相互作用」、「英語学習の動機付けのためのテクニック」についての講演を行った。これらの講演は、いわゆるヨーロッパや北アメリカにおける英語教育の理論や実践とは異なり、講演者たちの実際の日本での経験に基づく、日本独自の状況における英語教育論であった。英語のネイティブスピーカーの目から見て、日本人学生にはどのような特徴があるのか、日本人教師による伝統的な日本の英語教育をどう補完していくか、どのようにして日本人学習者を英語学習に向かわせていくか、といった英語教師にとって興味深いテーマが続いた。本論は、これらの講演の内容を報告するとともに、筆者の批評を展開したものである。

キーワード：英語、教育、動機付け

## Introduction

A one-day course of ETJ (English Teachers in Japan) was held at the Abeno YMCA, Tennoji, Osaka on Sunday June 23rd. English teachers from all over the Kansai area came to the Abeno YMCA for four presentations of the Certificate in Teaching Japanese Students. The course was sponsored by Oxford University Press and David English House.

The conference began with an opening ceremony—a welcoming speech by David Paul, the director of ETJ. ETJ is a society of English teachers in Japan, most of whom are native English speakers. ETJ courses have been designed to address the needs of teachers in Japan. All ideas of the courses derive from classroom research and trial-and-error experience in various kinds of Japanese

teaching situations; in contrast, many internationally-recognized training courses introduce theories and methodology which come out of European or North American teaching situations, and many of the assumptions behind these courses are less relevant in Japan.

The trainers for the Spring 2002 session were Dr. Rob Waring of Notre Dame Seishin University ("Reading Skill: Methods and Applications"), Maurice Jamall of Seikei University ("Classic Classroom Activities"), Curtis Kelly of Heian Jogakuin ("Interactive Speaking and Writing Activities"), and David Paul of David English House ("Motivation Techniques"). All trainers are leading professionals in the field and have extensive teaching and teacher-training experience. Some trainers will be international experts with a particular interest in Japan.

All the presentations were offered in English. Some pre-

sentations were like workshops, including a number of activities or discussions among the participants. There was also a publisher's display, which included mostly Oxford University Press materials. People from the publishers seemed to understand the trainer's ideas pretty well, for they have published many books written by the trainers.

The ETJ Spring 2002 course was an excellent opportunity for participants to discuss their English teaching problems, to try a lot of activities in an immersion situation, to improve their teaching skills, and to learn about and meet people from other English speaking countries.

Let me report on the four presentations.

## I. "Reading Skills: Methods and Applications" (based on the session by Dr. Rob Waring)

### A. Intensive Reading and Extensive Reading

Students in Japan are often taught to read a text very carefully and minutely, looking up a dictionary quite often. They are also taught to translate English into Japanese sentence by sentence. This usually happens in English reading classes in the department of literature or human studies at universities or colleges, because the Japanese English teachers who graduated from universities in Japan often teach the same way as they were taught. This kind of intensive reading might be a tradition of English teaching in Japan.

According to Dr. Rob Waring, this kind of reading which we often experience in Japanese reading class is called "Intensive Reading." There are merits to this kind of reading, of course. Because they have to look up each and every unknown word, students have the opportunity to learn each sentence clearly.

There are also, however, drawbacks to "Intensive Reading." First of all, students need a lot of time and a fair amount of effort to continue reading in this way. As a result, this process can be both tiring and exhausting for students. They cannot enjoy reading, so by and by they may lose their zest for reading, although they may have started reading with an eagerness to read the book in their second language. The end result, therefore, may be disastrous, for they may come to dislike reading and may give up reading altogether.

Reading problems in "Intensive Reading" may come from the fact that students aren't reading enough texts of the right kind and that they come across difficult words so often that they lose interest in reading. As a result of their exhaustion in reading, they may lose their confidence and may feel that they're wasting their time by learning inap-

propriate vocabulary. Although the teachers in Japan often feels that the similar problems happen in their classrooms, they often compel their students to follow the same route to learning reading, for lack of alternative approaches.

In order to solve problems like the above case, which often occur in English classes in Japan, Dr. Rob Waring suggested "Extensive Reading." "Extensive Reading" is similar to the way in which students learn to read in their mother tongue. They often start by reading very simple books, and then gradually move on to more difficult materials. Dr. Rob Waring thinks this approach would also work well for students who are learning second languages.

In "Extensive Reading," all the students are reading different materials at their own ability level. Every student can pick them up from a wide variety of books. If a student selects material by herself, she may probably be interested in it. The ideal speed of reading is about 60-80 words per minute or above with 90-95 percent understanding; in this way, a student may come across very few difficult words in early chapters and new words in later chapters. In "Extensive Reading," a teacher emphasizes reading for comprehension and enjoyment. If a student keeps reading a book per week at their own difficulty, she may eventually build reading fluency and reading confidence.

### B. Advantages and Disadvantages of Teaching Reading through Translation<sup>1</sup>

There are both advantages and disadvantages of reading through translation. One of the advantages we get through translation is that we can compare English and Japanese sentence structures sentence by sentence, so that we can gradually be accustomed to the two structures. The rules we learn through reading and translating can be more practical than the ones we learn by reading a grammar book, allowing us to use the rules more widely and freely not only in reading but also in writing and speaking. Also, we need to look up dictionaries very often to translate, so that we can learn how to use a dictionary and which dictionary we should use to solve each problem. To use a dictionary effectively is one of the most important factors to learn foreign languages. Reading and translating are, thus, inevitable for language learning, but are they effective for reading's sake?

Let us think about a situation of a collegiate student who will be reading a certain amount of books through translation. A student may start translating from the beginning of a book, and when she reaches the end of only one chapter she may have forgotten everything in the former part

because the task was too exhausting for her to have an entire image or concept of the chapter. Even though she might have understood what was written sentence by sentence, she fails to put together the whole image of the chapter or book. The reason may come from the amount of time and labor she needs to translate a language into another. This is a serious disadvantage of reading through translation.

Considering both the advantages and disadvantages of reading through translation, how should we teach reading skills? I think we need two ways of teaching reading skills: reading through translation and reading without translation. The two ways are very much like what Dr. Rob Waring has argued in his lecture: "Intensive Reading" and "Extensive Reading." We Japanese teach reading through translation, extracting grammatical rules and brushing up practical usage of the language, but we need to teach reading without translation to allow students to take a delight in reading through acquiring the whole image of the chapter.

## II. "Classic Classroom Activities" (based on the session by Maurice Jamall)

Whenever a teacher teaches, he or she makes assumptions about how students learn. To be good teachers, we need to be constantly questioning the assumptions. According to Maurice Jamall, there are three key factors behind task selection; "Schematic Assumptions," "Systemic Assumptions," and "Interpersonal Assumptions."

### A. Schematic Assumptions

This means taking into consideration the students' knowledge of the topic area or subject matter. A task such as "plan your dream beach resort" requires that students at least can picture a beach resort in their heads and have preferably been to one.

### B. Systemic Assumptions

This means taking into consideration the language needed to complete the task: functions, structures, vocabulary and so on. Continuing with our beach resort example, students will need at the very least the following: functions of suggestion, agreeing / disagreeing, giving and asking for opinions, vocabulary related to resorts.

### C. Interpersonal Assumptions

This means taking into consideration the relationships between the members of a class. Are they friends or acquaintances? Are they colleagues? Is someone senior to another? How do these interpersonal dynamics affect choice of task?

Maurice Jamall has presented an example of an activity at the lecture to explain his ideas about the three assumptions:

[Activity] Choose your dream lifestyle. From which country would you select each item? Countries can only be used once, so if you choose an English house, you can't have English food as well.

- A (    ) house
- A (    ) husband / wife
- A (    ) car
- (    ) food
- A (    ) economy
- A (    ) education
- A (    ) watch
- (    ) wine

### A. Schematic Assumptions

- People have a reasonable knowledge of what various countries around the world do.
- People have tried some of the items beforehand and can therefore make informed judgments, that is, a preference for French wine over Italian, Indian food over Thai and so on.

### B. Systemic Assumptions

- People have the language to do the following things: express likes and dislikes and preferences, use a variety of conjunctions, compare and contrast, ask open and closed questions, talk about the past and future. People can also form the adjective form of countries and have a grasp of count / non-count nouns.
- (Some) Specific structures / functions
  - I prefer X to Y because
  - I'm not fond of . . .
  - X is better than Y
  - I've never done X so I'm not sure
  - Have you ever . . . ?
  - English, French, Italian, American, Japanese, . . .

### C. Interpersonal Assumptions

- People are willing to talk about this subject with relative strangers in a language-learning context.
- People enjoy talking about different countries and places.
- The task is non-threatening. Selection is a personal preference. There is no moral judgment on your choice. Preferring Italian wine to French wine does not make you a bad person.

Here, let me explain, using one of the activities in his book:<sup>2</sup>

[Roleplay/Language Work: Overseas]

- i . Put the following on the board.
  - Just a little off the sides please. Leave the top long.
  - Go to the end of the road. It's opposite the florist.
  - Ten liters of unleaded please.
  - Two first class stamps to Japan please.
  - This way please. I'll show you to your table.
  - Two adults and a child for Screen Two please.
  - Go past the elevators and the pool's on your left.
  - I'd like to hire a mini-van for the weekend.
  - Would you like to try it on, sir?
  - I'm afraid we're out of stock in that size, madam.
- ii . In pairs, students to come up with the following:
  - a) where the utterance would be made; b) who would say it.
- iii . Monitor/assist as required.
- iv . Feedback: Go over answers.

What schematic, systematic and interpersonal assumptions need to be true in order for the activity to be successful?

#### A. Schematic Assumptions

- The students can at least picture the situations in which the utterances above would be made; at the barber's, at a gas stand, at a restaurant, at the theater, at a hotel, at a clothes store, and so on. For example, they can imagine a father who is planning to hire a mini-van for the weekend, although they cannot drive themselves because they are too young.
- The students have preferably experienced the situation themselves; e.g. they have been to the theater to watch movies and so on.
- The students have a certain amount of social experiences.

#### B. Systemic Assumptions

- People have the language to do the following things: ask questions, express their conjectures, talk about the reasons of their conjectures, and so on.
- People know the vocabulary related to some jobs or professions, such as a store clerk, a shop assistant, a guide, an information clerk, a receptionist, a waiter or a waitress, a driver and so on.
- People know the specific structures of functions:
  - I think that-clause
  - A person would say . . .

He would do such a thing when-clause  
Have you ever been to . . . ?

#### C. Interpersonal Assumptions

- People are willing to talk about this subject with relative strangers in a language-learning context.
- People enjoy talking about different social situations.
- The task is non-threatening. If you cannot guess properly, this only means that you have not been in the situation in the statements above.

How would you need to adapt the material to be more appropriate? In addition to writing the sentences on the board, the teacher could use gesture or some form of action to demonstrate the person in question. This will help students to understand the situation where the utterance would be made.

To help students to speak out, a teacher should write some words related to the jobs on the board, if necessary. I think a teacher should not do this beforehand, so as not to lose the students' enthusiasm of thinking on their own. But if prompted, a teacher could make lists of words which would make it easy for the systemic assumptions to become true.

If there are some people among the students whose occupation is the same as the one of the characters, they can ripen the conversation by adding some other comments.

### III. "Interactive Speaking and Writing Activities" (based on the session by Curtis Kelly)

There are four questions to think about:

- Why should we group speaking and writing together instead of the traditional speaking and listening?
- How do ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) environmental differences influence methodologies?
- What is the relationship between interactivity and language acquisition?
- How do we determine what a good interactive activity is?

To get us to think about the questions above, Curtis Kelly presents an activity as an example: "What's in the bag?" in which a teacher shows his bag to the students, who are expected to guess the contents of the bag.

First, there is an information gap between the teacher and the students. The interaction begins from this. In this activity the people who are interacting are teacher-

student, or student-student. The students may ask the teacher simple questions such as, "Is it a pencil?" or "Is it sweet?" The teacher may answer "Yes" or "No." The students may ask, "Do you use it when . . . ?" The teacher may explain, "It is a tool which. . . ." Language could be generated from the interaction between the teacher and students or between students.

In this style of communication meaning becomes more important than the form. In addition, if the teacher aims to teach a specific target language set, it would be possible for him to make his students generate specific languages by guiding the conversation either directly or indirectly. For example, in this activity the skills which are practiced are listening, asking questions, critical thinking skills, and so on. To make them understand the specific language target, the conversation should be transparent and easy to understand for them. The teacher should show them clear goals and clear tasks.

Beginning from a mere interaction, if guided properly, the students should be able to generate specific sets of languages to reach the clear goal. This would be interesting for them, because the language is generated spontaneously through the activity. In addition to spoken language, they could also use the activity to practice written language. It is in this that the presenter groups speaking and writing instead of speaking and listening.

How do we determine what a good interactive activity is? To explore this further, we need to know the learner's needs and basic characteristics. There are three ways to assess the learner's needs: linguistic needs, socio-cultural conditions, and dispositional conditions. Japanese adult beginners could have needs to learn deeply and quickly. Their learning style could be dependent. Their motivation to learn could be low. Their grammatical knowledge could be extensive. All these considered, we should think about the activity types that would probably work for these learners or ones that would not. And then we should design an interactive writing or speaking activity based on the criteria given in the learners needs assessment.

#### **V. "Motivation Techniques"** **(based on the session by David Paul)**

Many Japanese students study English at school for years but retain very little of what they have learned. Their results are usually very poor, compared to the amount of time and effort they were forced to put in. They often do pretty well in the class, or can get quite high marks in the entrance exam and so on. Probably they

know the grammatical patterns well and some of them can repeat what teachers pronounce correctly. But most of them use English only by parroting what teachers say rather than expressing their own feelings or thoughts. They would not usually apply what they have learned in the class to their own situations. They are just following their teachers. They can perform well in the classroom, but can't use English outside the classroom. They use English like parrots rather than human beings. These problems and many other problems cannot be solved until we all deeply question the assumptions we make when teaching.

It is sometimes assumed that we should input language and not expect students to produce it before they are ready to do so. Japanese students so often fail to do so. Most Japanese students are never ready to really produce the language.

Even when Output Approaches are used, it is very often assumed that a teacher should model language before students produce it. As soon as the teacher models a language point, she is sending out the message because it is the students' role to follow the teacher. In a real-life communicative situation there is no teacher who consistently models language and the student isn't trained for that situation.

Do most Japanese students really need English? High school students often need English to pass entrance exams to university, but it's a particular kind of English, and to most of the students it doesn't really matter if they are able to use English after the examinations. Then what are the main factors which affect the motivation of Japanese students?

Japan is a very comfortable country where people can get by very well without using English. It's not like some countries where English is a passport to a good job, or where being able to speak English is a way out of poverty. There is little passion for English in Japan.

Almost any exercise that feels like something the teacher wants the students to do will give little impression in Japan. Whether it's a listening exercise, a gap fill, a communicative task, it makes no difference. And anything academic is bound to fail except that a small percentage of students will succeed anyway.

In Japan, we have to "create a need." We have to stimulate students' genuine interest in what they want to learn. We have to train them to initiate the learning process, build their ability to ask questions, and stimulate them to want to explore the fascinating world of English. Most importantly, we have to generate genuine emotions and curiosity, which are coming from inside them. We need to

curb students' tendency to simply follow the teacher.<sup>3</sup>

Why do teachers teach? The more we teach, the less students learn. If we teach, then the students won't need to learn, and at a certain point many of them will forget how to learn. All they need is encouragement, confidence-building, and to be given the chance to learn for themselves. Instead of teaching, we can put the students in situations where they will encounter words and structures which they want to know. We are there to answer their questions when they want to find things out.

It's important to build the learner's confidence and motivation by minimizing the input of language and maximizing the time to play. The students should always feel that they are moving forward and discovering new things, but they should do so at a pace at which they can build their confidence, and the new words and structures they encounter should fit together into logical framework which tightly links together.

Effective learning is an emotional experience. When a learner encounters new words and structures for the first time it is important that she feels an emotional need for this new language, and when she practices she should continue to feel totally emotionally involved in the learning process.

If she is playing or singing something she really enjoys, and suddenly encounters a word or a structure she doesn't know, but which she feels she needs in order to play or sing successfully, she will feel an emotional need to learn. Perhaps our most important role as teachers is to put students in these kinds of situations. In this sense, the presenter argues that it is a good thing to 'confuse' students. While 'confused', they are willing to discover the language targets, having a lot of fun and being totally emotionally involved. Once finding out the language target, she would repeat the words or structures a number of times in the game and would be able to memorize, but the most important thing is that she can have a sense of achievement and that she will be willing to continue to discover things. When such a learner actually has a chance to use new words and structures in real life situations, she is much more likely to connect the new words and structures with her own emotions. If she had learned from dry sterile academic book, she would not be able to use the language in a real situation.

To communicate effectively in English requires, among other things, confidence, flexibility, and independence, not techniques. A teacher with the most wonderful techniques would not always succeed in encouraging students to learn more for themselves. 'Creating a need' and 'confusing' the students must be important as well.

## Notes

- 1 Rob Waring, *Graded Readers: The 'Why' and 'How' of Using Graded Readers* (Tokyo: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 2 Maurice Jamall, *Freestanding* (ABAX Press Ltd).
- 3 Based on the article by the presenter: <http://langue.hyper.chubu.ac.jp/jalt/pub/tlt/98/jul/paul.html>