教育実践報告

Making the Classroom More Communicative

MASUYAMA Yoriko and Miguel MISION

コミュニケーション重視の実践例

益山　代利子・ミゲル　ミ ション

Abstract

Observing many different English classes over the years – both by Japanese English teachers and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), the researchers have noticed a majority of activities mainly involving behavioral methods of learning. This paper explains how to make a common activity seen in most English classes "Karuta" more communicative, as well as introduce an example of a game that covers various aspects of language learning "The Liar's Game". The final portion of this paper covers lesson approaches and how to involve the Japanese homeroom teacher. English education through instruction alone is insufficient to provide appropriate language acquisition, the research highly suggests that students must also communicate with purpose for comprehensive language learning.

Keywords

Communicative language learning, karuta, manners, team teaching

Contents

Ⅰ. Introduction

Many English classes taught in Japan take an audio-linguistic or behavioral approach to language learning. The purpose being that with sufficient exposure and repetition, language learning can occur. Many scholars, however, would argue that communicative learning with purpose and language relative to learners that encourages contextualizing is more conducive to natural language learning order[1-3]. Several activities and teaching methods will be discussed to demonstrate ways to encourage communicative learning in the classroom.

Ⅱ. The use of Karuta in English Lessons: Issues and Improvements

Karuta is popular in English classrooms because being a Japanese game, the students are already familiar with the rules and format of the game and thus requires minimal explanation for the activity.

1. Issues with Karuta

Despite this, I have noticed that the game is very one-sided in its teaching approach and requires very little language production or processing from the student's perspective. As a listening task Karuta achieves its intended purpose, but I strongly feel there is room for improvement. For example, students only have to listen for a keyword and take the responding card. This is not a thorough indication of language learning but rather language conditioning. A learner could meagerly be responding to the language without actually understanding the meaning of the words.

2. Adapting Karuta for Communicative Approaches

Ideally the game should utilize a degree of language separation instead to give learners a chance to demonstrate their comprehension of the language - saying "A red fruit" instead of "apple", would thus require the student to understand both words "red" and "fruit" in order to select a fruit. Note that this method also lends to multiple correct answers; for example a cherry or strawberry. In contrast to traditional audio linguistic approaches, communicative learning emphasizes successful communication rather than language accuracy[2].

This method could expand in numerous ways with the application of adjectives (big fruit), other genres (orange vegetable) or other various hints (a monkey's favorite fruit). To further expand on this structure, Karuta can be made more communicative by requiring a question and response element to the game. Students could ask "What would you like?" the teacher would respond "Do you have a red fruit?" the student would then raise the card and reply "here you are". Several things happen during this exchange:

- Initiates drill exercises for future language and conversations
- Prompts students when to listen to the teacher
- Replicates natural language behavior
- Introduces the importance of using polite language

3. Importance of Manners in Language Teaching

An often overlooked aspect of teaching is mannerisms and etiquette in the classroom. Although it is commonplace knowledge to teachers, being a role model for students often means that every slight gesture and manner could easily be picked up and replicated by students. This includes things such as pointing at someone with an open palm, proper eye contact, yelling in class or even just using correct polite language such as "please, thank you and you're welcome". Thornbury suggests teaching learners proper manners is especially beneficial for students

who will find themselves communicating with foreigners, as a wrong slight could lead to frustration from the foreigner and discourage the learner[4].

4. Group Work in Language Learning

AThis structure also makes the game more co-operative and less competitive. Should the students become proficient with the task, they can then conduct the game among themselves. Group work is important for language learning in the way that learners interact with each other, "they tend to take more turns, and in the absence of the teacher, have more responsibility in clarifying their own meanings.

In other words, it is the learners themselves who are doing the language learning work"[5].

Ⅲ. The Liar's Game

An example of a more encompassing communicative activity for learners is called "The Liar's Game". The Liar's Game focuses on learning what Thornbury refers to as language "chunks", in using the phrase "I want to <verb> + <noun>"[4].

1. Instructions

Students will be seated in chairs and placed in teams based on their rows. The teacher will give a phrase for example: "I want to eat pizza", or "I want to drink baseball". If the phrase is lexically correct, the students are required to stand up and say "yes, that's right". If the phrase however is not lexically correct – a lie – the students remain seated, have to raise their hand and give the correct answer based on the noun (i.e., with the latter example "I want to play baseball" would be the correct answer). Points may be used for either the fastest team to all stand up or in the case of a lie - the team of the student that could correct the phrase.

2. Learning Objectives

Although at times the entire phrase may not be completely understood, the intention is for the teacher to lead and demonstrate and the class to copy. "Even though we do not explain the structure of a sentence explicitly, they realize that there has to be a subject and a verb without knowing what their grammatical functions are"[2].

The physical component of the activity requiring students to stand up quickly as a group aids in creating a co-operative atmosphere. Gibbons states that an organizational structure that requires participation from all group members ensures all students remain involved in the activity[6].

The "lie" component of the activity is a way to – as Scrivener puts it "play the devil's advocate"[7] and encourages students to challenge what the teacher may say. This includes utilizing language that may seem ridiculous or humorous to students
 • I want to buy the USA
 • I want to eat a baseball player
It should also be noted that the activity attempts to create a very natural environment for error correction. For example, if a student were to say "I want to go Italy", the teacher should still acknowledge the student's answer as correct, then when eliciting the class to repeat, rephrase the correct form "I want to go to Italy". It may be hard for young learners to come out and speak a foreign language in front of their peers, this predicament is worsened with the thought of saying the wrong thing or being told their pronunciation is incorrect. "Explaining to students that they have made a mistake is one of the most perilous encounters in the classroom. It has to be done with tact."[8].

Ⅳ. Language Learning Approaches

It can be said that many of the English classes personally observed in Japan have followed very instructional and recall based learning techniques.

1. Audio-lingual approach

Audio-lingual language memorization has its uses in the classroom, but considering the goals of ALTs and Assistant English Teachers (AETs) to encourage students to communicate – such approaches fail to establish any connection to practical language use or ability.

The problem of a purely audio-lingual approach is the lack of contextualizing ability and emphasis on repetition and teacher instruction – thus failing to address the needs of the students (especially in elementary school)[9].

2. Ideal approach

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) goals for the English curriculum are to build a positive communicative attitude towards English[10].

With this in mind, teachers should focus more on grammar and language that allows learners to express themselves and communicate among each other. Activities should be learner based and the target language should remain relevant to students.

V. Team Teaching

A lot of ALTs I have spoken to are often unsure of the role of the homeroom teacher in the classroom. This is inevitable considering the homeroom teachers have no clear idea either, some speak very little English and others are simply too busy with their own work. It is important for ALTs to try to involve the homeroom teacher where possible, to help sustain the authority in the classroom.

Even if the teacher does not speak English well, there are ways they can help such as helping with cards/materials, picking students for answers/demonstrations, praising students even in Japanese or even assisting in demonstrations even if they may get things wrong. Often if a homeroom teacher has poor English pronunciation, they will feel discouraged from participating in class and the ALT will also opt to make the most of their own native English. Kasuya disagrees with this, claiming the contrast between two pronunciations is noticeable for students and the chance to differentiate pronunciation is beneficial[3]. Another way to address the role of the homeroom teacher is to make time for English meetings with teachers or even leave written class plans for the teachers.

VI. Conclusion

Through personal experiences, almost all observed English classes in Japan have focused on behavioralist or audio-linguistic approaches. It can be said that a majority of classes have placed an emphasis on language memorization and being able to produce language on demand. Although this is an important part of the process of language learning, on its own does not necessarily equate to language acquisition. Language teachers must consider the needs of learners and encourage contextual and feedback based learning in the classroom to properly engage students in language learning.

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