研究ノート

Communicative Language Teaching

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英語教育におけるコミュニカティブ・アプローチに関する考察

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Abstract

This note will cover the basic principles, history and theories of Communicative language learning and how it can be utilised in the Japanese English classroom through lesson planning, teaching techniques and ways to introduce and revisit target language. Common critiques of using communicative methods will also be discussed and problems that may arise in the Japanese English classroom. Research on Communicative language learning in Japan indicates an improvement in student motivation and willingness to communicate.

Keywords

Communicative Language Learning, input hypothesis, comprehensive input, lesson planning

Contents

Ⅰ. Introduction

Ancient philosophers were known to observe and study human language learning behavior, but formal academic studies on language acquisition began in the late 1950's with papers by Skinner and Chomsky[1-2]. While there are various types of language acquisition methodologies, this note will focus on the contrast between the two most commonly used – behavioral and communicative learning.

In short, Behavioral language learning involves the use of teaching through repetition in a similar manner to the way humans regularly develop habitual behavior. The method forgoes grammatical instruction or explanation in favor of drilled exercises designed to make learning unconscious in its approach. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) by contrast focuses on learning through communicative purpose and contextualizing – in much the same way any infant observes and explores their own mother tongue. Rather than implicitly teaching a language, the communicative approach presents a learner with language input and tasks them with applying it to certain criteri [3].

Ⅱ. Communicative learning lesson structures

1. Input Hypothesis and lesson planning

If one were to introduce a communicative approach to learning, it is important to consider the curriculum and structure of lessons with reference to Krashen's input hypothesis. This theory suggests that language acquisition can be broken down into a process of steps – input, process, output, repetition and revision[4]. The input stage refers to learners being exposed to the target language. In elementary school this would involve the use of flash cards, songs and chants or asking open questions. The input stage does not require students to understand the target language but simply hear, listen and repeat. The process stage requires students to interpret and reproduce the language. This could involve games, quizzes, CD listening tasks and group work. Output as the final stage requires students to independently use and produce the language themselves; several examples include pair work, presentations or games/quizzes that focus more on the individual. Through all these processes, it is important for a teacher to gauge student understanding of the language. The output stage is crucial to assess learner comprehension and to determine if students need to revisit previous input or process stages, or move on to or build in to new language[5].

2. The importance of repetition and revision

One very common trait I have seen in demonstration lessons by both Japanese English teachers (JETs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) is to focus on one topic – for example numbers – and have a variety of different activities focusing on the same topic for an entire 45-minute lesson. Research has proven this to be disadvantageous especially for young learners as it can be exhausting and uninteresting repeating the same language. Studies suggest approximately 80% of familiar or review content and 20% new content to be the most advantageous for language learning[4]. This structure also combines well with Krashen's input hypothesis methodology of incrementally building upon existing knowledge to ease the transition of learning. I have used such structures in designing English curriculums for elementary school and the teachers were happy with the results.

This incremental structure of repetition is also important in encouraging students to participate in lesson. I have personally seen many ALTs and JTEs introduce a topic or new language then immediately start asking students questions or begin a game involving

the new language. In other cases, the teacher will introduce a topic then simply move on and not revisit the topic again. As adults this process of comprehending information is simple, but young learners need time and practice to consolidate their learning process[4].

Assuming the teacher is also utilizing communicative approaches and encouraging personal, expressive language use – this reinforces the need for ample preparation and familiarity with the language. For the Japanese, expressing their opinion in front of their peers is rare and can be the cause of shame should they be incorrect[6].

3. Student output as feedback

Considering this need for ample practice and preparation, lesson plans and the teacher's English curriculum should be flexible rather than rigid. Ideally, a teacher should be constantly adjusting their curriculum based on lesson observation and assessment. Successful teachers are those who can identify with the hopes, aspirations and difficulties of their students while they are teaching them[7]. In junior and senior high school this may be straightforward through assessment and examination grades. But in elementary school and in areas that might not necessarily be graded, this is not always so clear to the teacher. Considering this, it is desirable to create lesson plans with ample communicative and expressive output based activities for students to allow the teacher to gauge not only the student's language level but also their interests.

Ⅲ. Encouraging communication through cultural learning

Another often overlooked portion of lesson planning and material development is cultural education.

1. MEXT's statement

ALTs and JTEs will frequently focus predominantly on implicit language learning through their lessons. The Japanese ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), explicitly states that one of the goals of the elementary English program is to encourage enthusiasm and familiarity in communicating and learning about foreign countries[8].

2. Methods in teaching culture

There are a variety of ways to teach a lesson about foreign cultures. Photo presentations are common however usually carried out in a very one way style of learning which simply involves the teacher speaking the whole time. Turning a cultural lesson into a trivia game or quiz where students work in groups makes the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable by giving students a chance to discuss among themselves and share their knowledge. I have also seen other teachers opt for non-language lesson approaches, such as conducting a craft, cooking or sports lesson in English. This can create an atmosphere different to the regular classroom, free from the standard rigid inhibitions or anxiety that learners may feel being right or wrong – a natural environment to freely practice language[9].

Ⅳ. Communicative materials and target language

With regards to material development, it is important to choose language that students can relate to either through their day to lives or the things students will be familiar with. This keeps content relatable to students and not detached from the learner's own life experiences[10].

1. Practical and relatable language for learners

The introduction of purposeful language encourages learner autonomy, which can be used as references beyond the classroom and

independently of the teacher. "It is through learner independence that teachers can promote enough noticing which will eventually promote the basic degree of retention needed by our learners prior to storing the new information in their cognitive structures, assuring a certain stability for future automatic use"[11].

An example of purposeful language learning could be the introduction of verbs such as 'eat', 'play', 'drink' and 'see'. The teacher would then provide a series of verbs and elicit students to answer which verbs could be used with which noun. This style of learning also engages students in contextualising language and encourages learner independence. For example:

- Eat + Apple = Yes   • Drink + Coffee = Yes
- Eat + Basketball = No   • Drink + Cake = No

2. Paralinguistic communication

A key aspect of CLT is the application of aggregate communication techniques - such as the use of gesture, facial expression, intonation and visual aids to assist in student comprehension. An example of this would be reviewing emotion flashcards and mimicking the emotions and encouraging students to repeat the physical gestures as well. In the previous example with verbs and nouns, this can also be utilized by expressing suggesting right and wrong answers through facial and tonal expressions. This would provide another opportunity to enforce the use of suggestive positive language to help students understand the differentiation between correct and incorrect associations.

V. Comprehensible Input

Krashen's i+1 comprehensible input method of language acquisition emulates the natural learning order of an individual's first language, in the way learners hear words first and analyse and process structures[4]. Even though we do not explain the structure of a sentence explicitly, they realise that there has to be a subject and a verb without knowing what their grammatical functions are"[12].

1. Deduction and contextualization

By incrementally building on existing knowledge, learners are able to revise and practice familiar content while at the same time deducing new material by "filling the gaps". Brown argues in favor of such strategies of deduction and contextualization as a cognitive approach to ideal language learning[13]. Below are two examples that are used to introduce language for the elementary school lesson "I want to":

- Drink   • Eat
- Drink juice   • Eat ice-cream
- I'm thirsty   • I'm hot
- I'm thirsty, I want to drink juice   • I'm hot, I want to eat ice-cream

The examples exhibit an emotional condition for the target language which learners could then assume the meaning. To follow on from the examples, different emotions are given and learners are asked to create their own associative phrases. This is an example of communicative approaches using practical and personal language that students could express and share within the classroom.

2. Apperception

These examples stress the importance of exposing learners to as much language as possible without the use of their native language. Fortunately, there are a lot of borrow words in the Japanese language which help with learner "apperception", in which familiar language is input and recognized by students. This has advantages in overcoming moments of difficulty in communication by inputting language that is familiar to students, they gain an opportunity to cultivate both hearing and contextual analysis abilities[4].

Ⅵ. Issues with Communicative language learning

CLT is not without its critiques. The two most common being the need for a teacher with near native language ability and how communicative learning is not as effective for examination preparation compared to behavioral methods. With a focus on meanings and rules rather than grammar and structure, CLT leaves out implicit information that may have negative consequences for learners – especially considering examinations[14]. The counter argument to these points is that lessons do not necessarily have to be entirely taught in communicative methods. A teacher can conduct a single game using CLT, and thus the preparation would not be such a burden. With regard to examinations, it should also be taken into consideration that where teaching methodologies change, so too should the way learners are being assessed. It is the onus of the teacher to find more effective ways of testing and examination that reflect a student's effort and performance throughout a language course, to do otherwise would be highly irresponsible[15].

Ⅶ. Conclusion

It can be said that - especially in an elementary school - students are easily motivated so long as activities are enjoyable and entertaining. Ideally a teacher should look to find a balance between engaging students and learning value, the emphasis on these methods and approaches is on incrementally building communicative competency in a natural non-explicit manner. That is, through cumulatively building on previous structures and giving a communicative purpose to exercises it is hoped that fluency is gained through meaningful application rather than simple instruction alone. Research has shown that university students in Japan find communicative learning creates an environment where students can interact and communicate in real-life situations that provide opportunities to enhance their language skills through trial and error[16]. Reid also conducted a year-long study with first year elementary learners using communicative methods and concluded that students enjoyed the lessons and were also able to improve their communicative abilities[17].

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