

報告

大学生を中心とするコミュニカティブな 英語の授業についての提案

ディルク・ギュンター
徳島大学全学共通教育センター

要約：大学における中規模から大規模クラスで、学生が可能な限り長時間英語を話すようにさせ、教師は一步下がって学生が活発に英語で会話できるようガイド役をつとめる、という方法でどのように授業を進めるか、シラバスと教授法を紹介する。この方法の目標は学生の会話能力を高め、英語への抵抗を取り除くことである。

(キーワード：英語，大学教育，コミュニカティブ・アプローチ，スピーキング，リスニング)

Make Them Speak- A Suggested Approach to a Student Centered Communicative English Course

Dierk GÜNTHER
Center for General Education, The University of Tokushima

Abstract: The following article presents the syllabus and a suggested way of teaching medium to larger sized university English classes with the intention of giving students as much speaking time in class as possible. This is a student centered communicative approach with the classroom teacher mostly staying in the background, taking the role of a guide who challenges students to actively use their English skills. The course's goal is to improve students' English speaking skills as well as reducing students' resentment of using English.

(Keywords: English, Higher Education, Communicative Approach, Speaking, Listening)

1. Introduction

Looking at the syllabi of English classes offered at Japanese universities, it is fair to say that English language education at Japanese universities has shifted from just focusing on grammar drills to giving students more chances in class to actively use their English skills.

Evaluating the results of the yearly held TOEIC tests students are required to take at Tokushima University it is painfully obvious, that a major part of students' English skills are far from the level to be expected from a university student. The author of this article who has also had English teaching experience at Japanese Junior High schools holds the belief that this is not the result of an insufficient English education at Junior High school or High school level, but the fact that pupils generally have not had enough chances to actively use their English skills before starting university.

While in this respect classes at university focusing on giving students enough opportunities to actively

use English are of undoubted value, the university teacher faces several problems. The three points mentioned below are just examples of the typical problems faced by a teacher:

- Oversized classes of sometimes 40 and more students of different English levels ranging from beginner to upper intermediate level.
- Students who are too shy to speak in class.
- Students who have no interest in learning English.

This paper, based on evaluations of students' feedbacks suggests a possible approach which in the author's experience has been surprisingly successful to not only deal with the problems described above, but in achieving measurable progress in students' English speaking skills and to also generate motivation to continue learning English.

It should be noted, that the following suggestions are about a 'work in progress'. The syllabus presented here was at first tried out two years ago by introducing

presentations as the final semester exams. From then on new elements were steadily added or old elements were newly adapted due to personal evaluations undertaken by the author or based on students' feedback. While the syllabus described below has proven its worth, it will still be most certainly be subject to further changes in the future.

2. Essential Preparations

In order to successfully use the approach this author is going to introduce, several essential preparations are necessary.

(a) Classroom

The most important device for holding a communicative class is the arrangement of the desks in a way so that communication not only between teacher and students, but also – and even more importantly – communication between students is possible. The way tables are usually arranged in classrooms with desks facing the teacher/blackboard might be suited for lecture type classes, but is of no use when it comes to communicative classes. In this context this author asks students to rearrange the desks in the form of an open quadrangle which faces the blackboard. The space within this open quadrangle is the teacher's 'working space' where he/she freely moves around, proactively approaching students and has to be cleared of desks not used.

This arrangement offers several advantages:

- With the teacher standing and moving in the open space of the open quadrangle closer to students and more capable of addressing students, a classroom atmosphere with a more direct contact between students and teachers is established. It is important to note that this classroom arrangement demands of the teacher to be on the constant move so that students will get the feeling that they might be approached/asked by the teacher any time. For the teacher this can be very energy draining at times, but the reward for this effort is a high level of attention among students (as well as an

elimination of drowsiness.)

- With this arrangement of desks students can see each other too. This presents several advantages: Nobody has to be afraid of being made fun of by fellow students sitting behind him/her when making a mistake. During activities involving the whole class, one student can be asked to address another student sitting at the other end of the classroom, hereby having to speak in a sufficiently loud voice which is audible to the other students.
- The open space between the desks can also be used as a place for practices in which students have to move freely around. With this open space nonetheless 'restricted' by the desks, all students have to participate in the practice and cannot hide in the back of the classroom. The teacher can also mix with the 'crowd' and easily approach students.
- Students have to have the desks already arranged by the beginning of each class. According to students' feedbacks, this arranging of desks turned into a weekly group ritual involving the whole class. It hereby did not only serve as a 'mood maker' for the following class, but as every student was participating in arranging the desks the problem of students coming late for class was also solved.

(b) Consequent usage of English during practice periods

As blatantly obvious as it might seem, the author regards it as of ultimate importance to make students understand the fact that making mistakes is neither embarrassing nor a bad thing in other respects. Communication is based on spontaneity and a trait seen often with Japanese learners of English is their tendency of trying to plan in advance what they would like to say. While this might actually be a positive point when it comes to preparing speeches, this causes lots of problems during classroom activities, as this fear of possibly producing a sentence not up to

grammatically perfect standards produces uncomfortable breaks stifling any communication.

Students are from the very first lesson encouraged to ‘just use’ English, communicating by accepting the possibility of making mistakes.

In particular, during group and pair practices it is important that students stick to the ‘English only’ rule. Establishing and implementing this rule in the first class unit is therefore of great importance. While this author is not a supporter of an ‘authoritarian’ teaching style, students are told in no uncertain terms, that not sticking to this rule might even have the consequence of not passing the course.

This harsh and strict sounding measure is also accompanied by a further explanation given by the teacher: Pair practices only make sense when both partners are giving their best and if partner A tries to improve his/her English by actively using the language while partner B consequently doesn’t; partner B is guilty of cheating his partner of a valuable occasion to practice.

It has to be mentioned that since establishing this ‘English only’ rule the author never had to actually take any of the measures he ‘threatened’ possible perpetrators with.

3. Procedure

Keeping students’ motivation high over the full length of the course is important and can only be achieved by avoiding ‘routine’. This means the contents of each week’s lesson and activities should include as much variety as possible, so that students will never know in advance what to expect when they attend classes. As the course focuses on ‘Communication’ the teacher needs to consider that all classes have to contain activities which demand extensive oral communication by students. In order to also prepare students to speaking English in front of a bigger group, at the end of each activity a small final presentation held by the group or individual members should be planned.

Below follows now a suggested, annotated syllabus

for a course of 16 units.

Unit 1: Explaining the nature/contents/goals of the course. Establishing ‘English only’ rule and telling students to arrange desks before each class.

Unit 2: Getting to know each other/ Making students get used to speaking English with each other.

In this unit a longer version of the ‘Find Someone Who..’-game, which students should already know from junior high school/high school is being used. Students receive a worksheet containing 20 – 30 questions about their classmates. E.g.: When asked to ‘Find someone who has a birthday this month’ students have to walk around and ask so long until they find some who answers with ‘yes’. In this case students need to ask a follow-up question (“Will you have a party?” / “How did you spend your birthday?” etc.).

This activity is an excellent opportunity for the teacher to not only introduce himself to students on a more personal level by addressing them individually, but also to get a first impression of the classes’ level of English and students’ individual personalities. Talking to students one-on-one helps also to erase possible fears students might be holding when facing the teacher.

Units 3 – 8: These six class units are spent with extensive communicative activities (ranging from debates to group activities with final presentations.). Accompanying these activities, in order to build up students’ English vocabulary and as a preparation for the TOEIC test which students are supposed to take, vocabulary lists (about 8 – 10 pages of specialized vocabulary ranging from fields like ‘Society’, ‘Economy’, ‘Law’) are handed out weekly and short tests are being held during this period.

To give one example for possible communicative activities to be used during this period, the author would like to introduce the following activity ‘Interview Game’:

Students are told they are to play the role of a journalist who is soon to meet a VIP without

unfortunately knowing who exactly that person will be. As a preparation for this interview students have to write four general questions (no questions that can be answered only with 'yes' or 'no') they would like to ask the VIP. After writing down these questions, the students are being handed a 'post it' paper slip on which they have to write the name of a famous person (living or dead, real or fictive, manga characters can also be chosen). The class is then so arranged that students sit in two rows or a circles facing each other. Then students of one row are asked to put on the paper slip with the name of the famous person they just chose. These students will from now on be the mysterious VIP, while the students without a nametag will be the journalists. The journalist will now ask the questions he/she prepared while the student playing the role of the VIP will answer in the way his/her chosen VIP would probably answer. (e.g.: If a student chose the name of a famous Sumo wrestler and he might be asked about his favourite food, a possible answer might be 'Chankonabe'). Journalists have three minutes to ask the VIP all their questions and getting enough information to possibly write an article about this interview. After three minutes, journalists move to the seat to their right side and interview their next VIP. After four or five interviews journalists and VIPs change roles, with the former VIPs now asking their questions prepared.

After everyone has finished asking his/her questions, students may present the most interesting/weirdest/funniest answer they received. Depending on the teacher's plans, students can also be given homework by having to write a short article about one of the interviews they conducted.

Weekly activities like this can either be found in available textbooks, on the internet or can also be easily developed by the teacher. They are a very good way to prepare students for the first presentations to be held in Unit 9.

Unit 8: Preparation for poster presentations

In this unit students will be told that in the following week they are supposed to hold a poster

presentation of a length of three to four minutes. Students can choose whatever topic they want to talk about, with the condition that they speak freely without any notes, using only their posters for their presentation.

In order to train students to not only speak, but also to listen, the class will be split into presenters and listeners/judges who together with the teacher will grade the presentations.

As a tool for doing so, students receive a handout featuring the following criteria:

- The speaker used only English
- The speaker was well prepared and organized
- The speaker spoke loudly and clearly enough
- The speaker offered to answer questions and explained difficult words

Each of these criteria is to be graded from 0 (lowest) to 10 (full score) points. The handout also contains a 'commentary' section where judges have the chance to add further praise or criticism.

Units 9-10: Poster presentations

On the day(s) of the presentation(s) the class will be split up into presenters and listeners/judges, with each speaker holding his/her presentation between five to six times. Immediately after their presentations the teacher gives each student a feedback concerning his/her achievement.

Units 11- 12: Free Talk Sessions / Further feedback on poster presentations

In units 11 and 12 students are divided into small groups of 3 to no more than 5 students who will be given the chance to use their English in a different situation than the usual 'classroom situation'(each group having a time frame between 25 to 30 minutes). In the unit before these 'free talk sessions' students are given the assignment to check English news pages (usually bbc.co.uk or ABCnews.com) so they are informed on current events. These free talk sessions then start as interviews but will also address recent topics from politics to culture found on the webpages. Depending on the time, students will also get a further feedback on their poster presentation based on the

comments written by their classmates in the handouts.

Unit 13 and 14: Preparation for final presentation

The course's final exam will be a three minute speech about a topic of each student's choice taken out of the fields 'Culture', 'Politics', 'Economy'. The speech has to have a recognizable organization (introduction of topic – main body – conclusion) and should be held without reading (notes are nonetheless permitted.) Group presentations are permitted under the condition that each presenter's speech is organized according to the aforementioned pattern. As in case of the poster presentations – in order to train students' listening skills as well as securing a high level of attention – these final presentations will once again be graded by fellow students by using the same handout used to grade poster presentations.

In Unit 13 students will receive a basic instruction on how to give a speech. This introduction covers the organization of a speech, the use of gestures, the production and appropriate usage of media and common mistakes made while giving a speech.

Unit 14 is used for offering students the chance to either present the first results of their preparation for their speeches, helping out with possible problems, advising or answering individual questions.

Unit 15: Presentations

Unit 16: This final class unit is once again used to give students a general feedback on the final presentations held in unit 15.

4. Evaluation

According to the positive ratings and comments of the end of semester surveys, as well as personal feedback, students' reaction to the course's contents introduced above have been unexpectedly positive: The general feedback shows that students had the feeling of having achieved progress in their language studies, several comments even going so far as to state 'Before I started this class I hated English. Thanks to this course I found interest in learning English.' Especially appreciated was the fact that in each unit students had enough time and opportunity to actively

use their English. While some students were not too happy with the large amount of vocabulary handed out and tested weekly during the first half of the course, it was nonetheless admitted that the vocabulary learnt turned out to be very helpful when it came to preparing their presentations/speeches.

The rate of students failing this course was – considering the amount of preparation and learning students had to do in order to cope up with all the assignments and tests given – comparatively low. Generally in classes with 40 students about 2 to 3 students did not pass, the reasons being either the students not thoroughly preparing the vocabulary tests or having stopped attending classes after a few units. Up to now only one student failed the course due to not having adequately prepared for his final speech. Interestingly, this 'speech' was also overwhelmingly rated as a failure by his classmates.

In all classes this course was tried out, students stuck consequently to the 'English only'-rule during classroom activities. During these activities many students whose English skills were lower than those of their classmates had a very hard time during the first part of the course. On the other hand, especially in the case of these students, an increase in confidence in using English could be seen, when it came to holding the poster presentations or final speeches.

The experience with making students hold presentations/speeches has been mixed: While the majority of students obviously enjoyed preparing poster presentations and speeches, coming up with astonishingly creative posters and topics for their speeches, a lot of students also took the easy way:

Especially during poster presentations several topics presented were not on the level one would expect of a university student: Several students went so far as to elaborate on 'Pokemon' or 'Hello Kitty' characters. Although this author would have preferred students to chose topics more worthy of a 20 year old university student, as the intention of the poster presentation was to make students get used to and feel more comfortable to speak freely about a given topic for

three minutes, these rather childish topics were in case of the poster presentations permissible.

A more serious problem in connection with these poster presentations was that many students prepared too thorough by not only preparing a poster but also preparing a speech which they memorized and simply repeated during their presentation. As the intention of the poster presentation activity was free speaking, the author had to instruct students listening to such presentations/ speeches to interrupt the speaker with questions in order to make him/her deviate from this prepared speech.

In case of the course's final assignment (3 minute speech) another problem occurred. While students were actually required to memorize their speech, some of them did not prepare speeches of their own, but resorted to obviously memorizing full articles found on Wikipedia and other internet sources.

A final matter which will need further consideration in the future is as follows: In order to create a realistic setting for the speakers it was necessary that all the classmates were present when the speeches were being held. As important as it is to train students also to listen to other people speaking English, it has to be clearly stated that listening to speeches held at times with struggling pronunciation and grammar is even for the highest motivated student exhausting and becomes boring after a while.

On a final note, giving students the responsibility to grade their classmates' presentations/speeches turned out to be a very rewarding experience in all classes. Most of the grades given by students to their classmates turned out to be identical with the grade decided by the teacher. Even more positive was an evaluation of students' commentaries written on the handout's 'commentary' section: Most of these comments (written in Japanese) contained valuable feedback for the speakers and were consequently used by the teacher for advising students during the course's final unit.

5. Conclusion

This paper described one suggested way of holding a course which focuses on 'English Communication', thus giving students enough chances to actively participate in class. While – as has been seen – there are still many points to be improved, general student feedback shows that this suggested approach might turn into the right direction. The author would be delighted, if this paper might be of useful assistance to English teaching colleagues for their future classes.