Are Communicative Language Tasks Appropriate in the Foreign Language Classroom?

Giles Parker

Introduction

Foreign language teachers in mainstream education in Japan i.e., public Junior and Senior High schools, Junior colleges and universities in Japan work in restricted, inefficient conditions in terms of time (one or two sessions a week), often with large, generally indifferent classes (e.g., general English classes in Liberal Arts), and under pressure to teach towards an unvalidated and irresponsible test (especially in Junior and Senior High schools). Junior and Senior high school teachers are forced to use centralized curricula and texts they did not choose and that are open to question in terms of the selection criteria for the language and activities they present and use. There is also doubt whether exam questions actually fit the takers. University teachers know that despite their efforts, the majority of their time is spent attempting to motivate students who do not need the foreign language, yet need the grade. For these reasons we can see that foreign language teachers are constantly concerned with issues that restrict their efficiency even before they have begun the lesson. Teachers ask: How can we efficiently bring about that change in our students that signals that language is being learnt?

The main way of initiating this change in class seems to be through providing an activity of some form. Different visions of language and language teaching/learning will involve different kinds of activities to present and/or practice the selected knowledge or skills. Activities can range from just listening to the teacher without even indicating comprehension, to reading clozes, to discrete-point grammar tests, to pair work information exchanges, to problem solving games, to simulations and role-plays. Perhaps the unifying feature in all of these is that the learners are doing something with language; either just comprehending or actually producing language. They are either changing something using language, or being changed. We hope this change signifies increased ability.

This notion of activities in the classroom conforms with Breen’s (1984) definition of task. A task might include such concepts that exist on a scale between manipulation of language (whether it is language as a skill or language as knowledge) and non-manipulation, interaction and non-interaction, production (though not necessarily verbal or communicative) and non-production. The task
might be teacher centered or learner centered. The goals, roles, rules, standards and information might be teacher derived, or generated by the learners. Perhaps all we can be certain of is that the task requires learner understanding of the task, the input, and the goal of the task. Kumaravadivelu (1993) discusses the terminological and conceptual confusion about tasks. He points out that this is the result of different writers working from different perspectives and towards different goals. For the uses of this paper we will accept Breen's definition of task.

Tonkyn's (1996) timely reappraisal of communicative language teaching points out that task as a methodology has become the new orthodoxy in language teaching. It is a product of the communicative language teaching paradigm but seems to have become a method in its own right. He means that language teaching has defined task more rigorously and perhaps more restrictively than the above suggestions. Furthermore, this orthodoxy asks that efficient classrooms coincide with this definition. The current view of task tends to be heavily communicative and productive, learner centered, open-ended, with a heavy focus on meaning and the negotiation of meaning, at the expense of form, or grammatical accuracy. There is an awareness of the goal of the task (what do we want to improve?), the roles of the teacher and the learner, and the correct process towards that goal. A task is often the result of a needs analysis, and may even include a means analysis. In ideal cases, a task may be the result of negotiation between the students and the teacher. They may jointly decide what they want to learn and how they want to learn it, and what constitutes a successful task. There is an emphasis on real-life communication and interaction, mostly between the non-native speaker learners.

Nunan's (1989 : 10) definition of a communicative task is perhaps the most representative. He sees communicative tasks as

'a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.' (Nunan's italics.)

Nunan makes the distinction between communicative and other types of language task. His appeal to the communicative language teaching paradigm may be in keeping with second language teaching in target language cultures, but might be a distant ideal in other, more restricted situations. In Japan, as elsewhere, we often find ourselves challenged in teaching efficiently. While we might adhere to the imported notions involved in communicative tasks, it is often impossible to implement them. Furthermore, these notions may even be completely alien to some teachers. However, it is not impossible to use a less restrictive, more appropriate,
home-produced definition to adapt and improve tasks that would lead to more effective language lessons. We should recognise that tasks are important and beneficial but that one ideal imported version may not be appropriate for us. The fundamental difference may be that we are teaching in an environment where many of us are not in control of the curriculum, and in a cultural millennium that does not readily appreciate the philosophical basis that underpins communicative language tasks.

This paper aims to discuss some of the issues concerning tasks. Specifically we will discuss arguments for tasks as a basis for language teaching and look at some of the issues concerning task-oriented language teaching in Japan. We will finish by discussing some of the questions we should ask before we design or adapt a task.

**Reasons for communicative task-based lessons**

Tasks, whether communicative or not, are appealing because we hope they show us learners using language or skills we perceive to be necessary. A summary of the benefits includes the following:

1) Logistic benefits in that there are increased opportunities to use the language,
2) Increased opportunities for comprehensible input,
3) Increased opportunities for comprehensible output,
4) Increased confidence and motivation in speaking,
5) Decreased stress, due to peer support and negotiation of meaning,
6) Practice in using communication strategies,
7) Increased student awareness of their responsibilities as foreign language learners,
8) A balance between accuracy and fluency means less stress to be correct,
9) Increased use of academic skills,

At a basic level, learner-learner interaction means increased opportunities to use the language (Long 1981). Viewed logistically this is a benefit for all. The learners need to communicate with each other to perform the task, leading to both greater language input and meaningful output (Swain 1985). I have often heard teachers trying to maximise opportunities for students to speak by repeatedly asking them individually the same questions. Obviously, it is very inefficient for a teacher to attempt to talk to each student individually during a class. What do the other students do? Do all the students have an equal chance of communicating with the teacher? Of what kind of quality is the interaction? A better way would be to have learners benefiting from each other as they interact in small groups with the teacher monitoring and advising groups. This is supported by research by Long, Adams, McLean and Castanas (1976), (cited in Nunan 1993) which sugge}
that small group tasks force students to employ a wider variety of language than traditional teacher fronted tasks. Nunan (1993) also quotes research by Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985) that finds that students in small groups make greater gains in language, including grammar, than in a traditional teacher-fronted format.

Communicative tasks mean that learners must find the means to communicate, and an implied by-product of this is an increase in language acquisition. The implied focus on meaning appeals to Krashen's Input Hypothesis. This argues that comprehensible and meaningful input - a basic tenet of a communicative task - leads to acquisition. Krashen (1983) suggests that a focus on form, such as grammatical correctness and linguistic accuracy, would detract from the process of communication. In Krashen's terms, the monitor would reduce output and increase the affective filter. We know that learners are happier when they are not worrying about whether they are being judged on their grammar.

We also know that learners often pick up new vocabulary, learning strategies and parts of grammar from each other in a form of peer teaching. Porter (1983) finds that students talk more with each other than with native speakers, including teachers. Not having to communicate one-to-one with the teacher in front of the class may greatly reduce stress. Furthermore, learners can often help each other in a way that a teacher can not. This is certainly the case for foreign teachers.

The demand for communication means learners have opportunities to acquire and use communication strategies (Tarone 1983). Confidence in these strategies would be beneficial to learners in any situation, whether pedagogic or 'real-world', and indeed are often consciously presented and practiced as a communicative task in recent textbooks (cf. Marathon Mouth). Communication strategies allow learners to take control of the interaction for their own benefit. These involve strategies such as clarification strategies, where people can ask questions or give hints asking for more information; comprehension checks to make sure the other person understands the speaker; and repair strategies as ways of reformulating what they want to say so that the other person will understand. Learners may not know a word but may try to describe it approximately. For example a learner might say "Yesterday I see my friend. He is not good. He is at sick place, many sick people, doctors" and perhaps he means he visited his friend in hospital. However, the learner has used approximation strategies to communicate, instead of just giving up because he didn't have the vocabulary.

Finally, the effect of successful communication is self-fulfilling in that success encourages further success. Learners realise that a foreign language is not just to be dissected and learnt by rote, but that it can become a tool that can be used. When learners have successfully completed a task they realise that they did
something using the language as a tool. The language was not the main aim of the task; the language was the means. Feedback from successful communication surely increases motivation and confidence. Success shows that language learning is useful, and may even (God forbid!) be fun.

**Issues we should be aware of**

We have seen that there are some very strong reasons for using communicative tasks in our classrooms. However, taking Tonkyn’s (1996) reappraisal of communicative language teaching as a basis, we shall look at some reasons why tasks may not be appropriate in our classrooms in Japan. There are two sets of concerns. The first raises questions about the general efficacy of communicative tasks. The second is concerned with the use of tasks specifically in Japanese Junior and Senior High schools.

**General Issues**

This section raises the following questions: a) Does comity mean meaning is adequately negotiated by learners during the task, b) Are communication strategies used? c) Might not the over-use of strategies reduce the need for accuracy? d) How do we know what is being acquired? e) Is there a danger of junky input? f) How can we evaluate the task? and g) Are there problems with the novel roles?

Tonkyn raises the question of the quality of interaction within a task. He suggests that comity, or attempting to preserve interactive harmony, probably takes up more of the language within a task than is ideal. This means that comprehensive input is reduced, meaning is not negotiated and, despite completing a task, learners have spent more time agreeing with each other than anything else.

Students may also be more prepared to accept less rigorous levels of meaning. How strictly do they adhere to meaning in their negotiations, or are they liable to let the other person ‘get away with’ a less accurate version as they attempt to maintain comity? If students have spent time agreeing with each other, are they really interacting? We must ask ourselves if this is a really efficient use of our limited time in class. Does comity imply communication? Have students been changed in anyway i.e., have they learnt something or improved something?

We should also question the use of communication strategies. I have argued that communication strategies foster independence, confidence and autonomy in learners, but do they really use them during a task? Do students really use clarification strategies to request more information, or are they too shy? Do they really ask whether the other people understand them? How often do they reformulate their utterances to ensure communication? Do they ever ask for help? Though communicative tasks provide opportunities to develop communication strategies, do learners actually take them? This may be a particular problem in
Japan as we shall see later.

Alternatively, students can completely miss the point of the task because they are concentrating too much on using communication strategies. Over-usage means that accuracy is being sacrificed. Learners may not be bothering to use the most appropriate vocabulary, not because they don't know it, but because they know they can 'get away with' approximations and paraphrases and expressions of comity. Tonkyn even suggests that increased usage of these strategies may be a way of ignoring improvement in other areas. Learners may be 'getting away with' using these strategies - and consequently not using appropriate language - but may not be focusing on the task. What should the teacher's response to this situation be? Is the task really effective?

Learners interacting in a foreign language is an ideal, but can we be certain that they are actually acquiring anything? There is still little empirical research to suggest that comprehensive input leads to acquisition. As we watch our learners struggling, we must ask ourselves, what are they really learning? Are they improving what we think of as language skills? Is their knowledge of language increasing? If so, what skills and what knowledge? How are they improving? O'Neill (1991) says that so much of what we know about our classes is still very much 'anecdotal and personal rather than scientific and empirical.' Teachers need to be aware of what is actually taking place in their tasks. They need to know how the learners are changing and being changed. Intuition, subjective impressions and anecdotal evidence are not enough. It would be better if we could predict the changes, based on empirically collected data.

If we continue to question what language is being acquired, then we must also consider the issue of 'junky' input. O'Neill points out that this is a potential result of a meaning-focussed task that urges communication at the expense of accuracy. For example, learners will learn from each other that "Yesterday I see my friend. He is not good. He is at sick place, many sick people, doctors" may be acceptable and even accurate. If Krashen's comprehensive input theory is correct, then learners are in danger of acquiring each other's bad habits and 'junky' input along with examples of correct language. Is this what we want our learners to be doing? How useful is it for our learners to acquire language from each other? Do they really learn anything valid? Is 'junky' input acceptable? What level of inaccuracy should we accept?

Ellis (1995) raises another important issue: What constitutes a successful task? Is it when students respond positively to a post-task questionnaire? e.g., 'I enjoyed the role-play.' Or is it when they have learnt something? If so, what is it they have learnt and how do we discover this? Task evaluation depends on the nature of the task. Ellis points out that a task may vary in terms of how open or closed it is. An open task means that the task has no single correct answer, but
that the process towards fulfillment of the task is evaluated. The teacher creates her own criteria for evaluation which Ellis suggests is usually impressionistic. An example of an open task would be a role play where students create a short play based on a series of pictures. There is no right or wrong answer. A closed task involves a restricted answer, e.g., on a grammar multi choice or a reading cloze or a True/false listening comprehension. There is only one correct answer which means it is easy to see whether learners are performing the task or not.

Communicative language tasks tend to be more open, but this raises many questions. How do teachers and learners know when learners are being successful? What parts are evaluated? What is the criteria for evaluation? If the task is repeated, how can learners improve on their previous evaluation? How do teachers know what is being learned and when it is being learned? Do we look at the product, e.g., a picture of the speaker's bedroom drawn by the listener, and judge how accurate it is? Do we judge the quality of the language used, which means explaining the criteria for evaluation, and listening to every group? As Ellis says, it may be possible for learners to learn something, but to fail to perform the task. And it is possible for them to perform the task without showing they have changed in anyway.

Finally, communicative language tasks imply novel roles for teacher and learners. Learners are expected to interact with each other and be creative. They are expected to use language to improve their language. The role of the teacher becomes that of a facilitator and advisor and manager. However, we should be aware of the criteria for teacher intervention. When does the teacher correct errors? What type of errors does she correct? What kind of advice does she provide? How does she provide it? Does teacher intervention upset the nature of the task?

In summing up the issues so far, we can see that despite very strong arguments for using communicative language tasks, there are some fundamental questions that we should attempt to answer. In answering these questions for herself, the teacher will be able to create more efficient tasks.

**Problems specific to Japan**

We now turn to perhaps a more fundamental issue given our situation. These issues are specific to Japan, but may also be applied to other cultures. We will discuss: a) Is an imported methodology culturally appropriate? b) The problems raised by novel classroom roles, c) The issue of exam oriented education, and d) The influence of cultural norms for communication.

Communicative tasks as an orthodoxy is not native to foreign language teaching in Japan. It is imported from a humanistic philosophical tradition that currently sees language education as communicative and focused on increasing
individual autonomy. Language is a tool for use in the real world beyond 'unreal' pedagogic activities. It emphasises interaction and meaning at the expense of form. It allows for various roles and responsibilities for teachers and learners, so much so that the teacher becomes less authoritative and more managerial. Learners are encouraged to exercise greater independence and creativity. The power distance between the teacher and the learner is reduced so that the teacher can respond to learners' needs and provide more individualised classes. Learners are often encouraged to be more aware of their learning situation, and to negotiate both the content and the methods for their classes. Syllabuses, materials, texts and class activities are more flexible. Teachers will often quickly adapt all to meet their students' needs.

This paradigm is predominantly informed by linguistic and classroom based research into second language acquisition. This means that theory and empirical investigation is oriented towards language learners who are already enjoying the benefits of being in a target language culture, who are more than likely involved in tertiary courses and are well motivated and 'good' learners. We are forced to ask: How valid is such an imported theory over a native one? How efficiently does current theory transfer to foreign language teaching environments? After all, these theories are often generated in environments that are completely different from our own. Is this theory valid for us?

Importing communicative tasks may be culturally inappropriate or invalid for many reasons. For example, current teaching methods, classroom roles, and responsibilities of learners and teachers are more strictly defined in Japan. Classes are teacher-fronted. The teacher possesses the knowledge which has to be imparted to the learners, who have to absorb it through repetitive drills. Learners are not expected to develop independence or be creative. The curriculum, and thus the teacher, controls every aspect of the lesson from the language covered to the way it is used. Learners do not have a franchise on their own classroom. This results partly from a vision of language as a body of knowledge that can be reduced, dissected and reassembled. Texts are designed with scant regard to the validity of the language presented. What we see is classical grammar-translation. It may be that communicative tasks are not in line with the methods of language teaching in Japan.

The issue of classroom roles and responsibilities is central to the argument that communicative tasks may not be culturally appropriate. Teachers are themselves products of the educational system and are fundamentally interacting with it. They may not appreciate the benefits of communicative tasks because they are steeped in their culture, and are working to support it. They may not appreciate the usurpation of their traditional role as controller and source of all that takes place. Why should they undermine their culture when they can't see the
benefits? They know they have to produce exam-takers, which is different from language users. They have to endure all the problems mentioned above at the beginning of this paper. Richards and Lockhart (1994: 108) quote one Japanese EFL teacher who found that communicative language tasks were viewed as inefficient teaching by the students.

‘If I do group work or open-ended communicative activities, the students and other colleagues will feel that I’m not really teaching them. They will feel that I didn’t have anything really planned for the lesson and that I’m just filling in time.’

Richards and Lockhart give no answer to this problem of cultural conflict. They only say ‘While these misunderstandings may at times be unavoidable, they can be minimized through a greater awareness of their sources.’ They do not suggest or discuss how we can explore and resolve these differences.

It might be suggested that Japan does not readily engender a communicative task oriented ‘personality.’ That is, learners are happier believing in the authority of the teacher. They may not want to interact or be forced to communicate with each other. Learners are often not inclined to initiate a conversation or to interrupt each other. We saw earlier how the increased opportunities for using communication strategies can be offered as an argument for tasks, however, in Japan, as in other cultures, speakers are reluctant to show their own implied ignorance (asking for clarification) or imply another’s ignorance (checking for understanding). This reflects cultural norms for communication, which will be discussed below. In communication in Japan, the onus is on the listener to understand the message, not on the speaker to make sure the listener understands. This reluctance to interact might be attributable to a form of cultural psyche. How many times has “We Japanese are shy” been offered as an excuse for a lack of communication? It might be that noisy, interactive and negotiable tasks do not favour the Japanese psyche, particularly in Junior High schools where students do not wish to be seen to be different, or more able to communicate, than their classmates.

The novel roles in task based learning may reduce the lesson’s credibility. Tasks, like many creative activities, ask the participants to have faith in their fundamental benefit. We need to believe that what we are doing is good for us. However, in Junior and Senior High schools, where learners and teachers are unaccustomed to such creativity and freedom, they may not be willing to suspend their disbelief. This gives rise to a ‘jokey’ atmosphere. Learners may see that the task is too much of a game and has no relation to the accepted and expected parameters of a normal class. Task based classes may become more of a time to relax and chat with friends than an essential part of language learning. Learners may lose sight of the carrot and the stick that is behind so much of our class
work. For example, learners may not understand the rationale for the task or believe that by doing it they will improve in anyway (the carrot). Alternatively, they may not perceive how they will be evaluated and that it is important to their grades (the stick). Teachers themselves may not trust an atmosphere where the language is out of their control and where students are producing 'junky' language, especially given the pressure on teachers to produce learners that pass exams.

Furthermore, Japan's vision of education and language learning is rather different to Western ideas of education, and certainly at odds with the ideas underpinning communicative tasks. The aim of language teaching is predominantly to pass university entrance exams, despite appeals to 'internationalisation.' University entrance exams are written by so-called 'specialists in their fields' but very rarely go through any form of validation. Brown (1995) points out that entrance exams use out of date testing methods such as multiple choice discrete-point grammar questions and translation questions. Items are not tested in any form so it is unknown whether they fit the candidates. Furthermore, and perhaps of most importance, Brown demonstrates a lack of fit between exams and the curriculum studied. Reading tests are based on complicated texts that are much more difficult than the simplified texts high school students usually study. There is a great difference between the skills and knowledge necessary to perform tasks, and that needed to pass such exams. Ethically speaking, should Junior and Senior high school teachers be concerned with increasing communication, or with increasing exam taking skills? Teachers realise that these goals may be mutually exclusive, but also that there could be a compromise that will allow for the learners to gain the benefits of communicative language tasks and still pass entrance exams.

Finally, we should be aware that cultural norms for communication may transfer during interaction. This means that communicative tasks may or may not be suitable because of what the learner accepts as being the correct way to communicate. For example, Tonkyn raised the point that comity may reduce interaction. Comity is undeniably an essential part of any interaction and learners probably need practice in maintaining interactive harmony. From a cross-cultural point of view, Japanese norms of interaction greatly enforce comity, or the maintenance of the semblance of harmony between people. They may feel more obliged to show comity than is usually accepted by native speakers of English, not because they are not performing the task, but because they are transferring their cultural norms of interaction. Does this mean that a task is ineffective? How far should we allow this? Obviously this will depend to a certain extent on the nature of the task, but all the while learners will be interacting within the parameters of their own norms.

For both cultural and general reasons, it is questionable whether the
wholesale use of communicative language tasks are appropriate for Junior and Senior High school language classes. Given that teachers in public Junior and Senior High schools are not in control of their curriculum, it is unlikely they will be able to use communicative language tasks as a basis for their syllabus. University teachers and private school teachers may be in a more flexible situation. What follows next are some hints on how we can resolve these concerns and more appropriately implement tasks.

Hints on implementing tasks

There are no easy solutions to the above concerns. It would be an act of cultural imperialism to recommend the whole sale imposition of an imported methodology. However, awareness of the sources of conflict can lead to a sensitive compromise that takes in to consideration the benefits of communicative language tasks, and the implications of cultural differences. This involves giving teachers and learners the ability to make an informed decision as to how they will make use of tasks. Above we discussed both specific and general concerns about using communicative tasks in Japan. I want to suggest they can be resolved by: 1) Conciousness-raising among both learners and teachers, and 2) involving learners in creating tasks. I realise that consiousness-raising and learner involvement are again imported ideals, but I believe that with sensitive and appropriate discussion they can help bring about culturally appropriate language tasks.

Conciousness-raising means encouraging teachers to generate their own methods and materials. There is a need for more research and data into the efficiency of both imported and native methodologies. Which seem to produce better results? It is not enough for Junior and Senior High school teachers to rely on their textbooks and their previous experience. Teachers, as the end-users of other peoples’ theorizing, need to play a greater role. This would lead to development of home-produced theory that might be more appropriate because it would have been generated in the environment in which it will be applied and further refined.

There also needs to be greater discussion and cooperation between universities and Junior and Senior High schools. Entrance exams are the be-all and end-all of language education. If we accept that communicative language tasks greatly increase language acquisition, as was suggested earlier, then how can schools incorporate them into their classes and still produce successful exam takers? Universities should be more aware of the curriculum exam takers follow. Maybe universities need to rethink their position on the nature of their entrance exams. Exams that involve more communicative language testing would reflect and fit the skills and knowledge of learners who had passed through a curriculum involving communicative tasks.
Consciousness-raising also means gently training learners so that they realise the rationale behind their new roles. They need to be aware of what is expected and how they should interact. This involves bringing the learners into the task creation process. Tasks should not just be something that is done by the learners, but something that comes from them and is oriented for them. Again, this means the teacher has to dilute her traditional role and be prepared to negotiate more with her learners. Here are some hints on how this can be done:

1) Create objectives. What are our goals? What do we aim to achieve by this task. Share these objectives with the students. Can the students create more appropriate goals?

2) Create and share a rationale for the task. Students will perform better if they understand WHY they are doing something, and what is hoped to be achieved. Ask them to create a rationale. This would increase their awareness of their own learning.

3) The objectives can form part of the criteria for evaluation. Emphasize evaluation of the product. Students should be working together to produce something, using the language. Involve students in the evaluation. Explain to students how they will be graded. Ask them if the criteria are attainable. Can they create more appropriate criteria? Are they prepared to use the same criteria to grade each other?

4) Analyze the task to find what linguistic knowledge and skills are needed to perform adequately. Do the students have the knowledge and skills? If not, how can this be given? Prepare the students so that they can do the task. This means making sure they have the ability to perform. Tonkyn (1996) suggests teachers do the task themselves to discover what processes actually take place.

5) Check the relevance and level of the input material. Can students manipulate it? Will students feel intrinsically motivated? Is it not beyond their interest and experience? Give it face validity by linking it to text books, or exams, or material students are familiar with.

6) Prepare smaller units with in the larger task. These should be valid and autonomous in their own rights, but should also form part of the ‘chain’ (Nunan 1989). They might focus more on accuracy than meaning, and may be dependent on the completion of the previous task.

7) Emphasize convergency i.e., working together to solve a problem rather than divergency, i.e., a debate or just expressing one’s ideas. Bearing in mind Tonkyn’s comments on comity, some styles of task may favour different amounts and styles of interaction. Learners may interact more if they have a common goal. If they just have to say what they think then there will be little interaction.
8) Provide preparation time and rehearsal time for any performances i.e., role plays, simulations, posters. Give time for students to check they understand what needs to be done and how they should do it. After the task, allow time for students to perform certain parts again. In some cases it is difficult to get it right first time.

9) Give follow-up exercises that focus on accuracy using the material from the task. These could be vocabulary tests, comprehension quizzes, grammar clozes, word-searches, etc.

10) During the follow-up time, elicit and discuss problems, impressions, successes and failures. Where were the learners confident? What was difficult to do? What was very easy? Did the learners feel it was useful? How could it be improved? Give and get feedback on their performances.

11) Ask students to adapt or create their own tasks. Collect and maintain a data bank of material for use in tasks. Ask colleagues to test your task plans, and test theirs. Share information with colleagues.

Conclusion

We have seen that there are strong arguments for the use of communicative language tasks in our classes. We have also seen that there are issues we should be aware of. These are general problems concerning the efficacy of tasks, and specific problems concerning their use in Japan. I have suggested that giving teachers and learners the chance to make a decision by raising their awareness and by involving them in producing tasks will lead to more culturally appropriate language tasks. I hope that we can enjoy the benefits of tasks without threatening Japanese culture.

Bibliography

Long, M., Adams, L., McClean, M. & Castanos, F. 1976. Doing things with words:
Verbal interaction in lockstep and small groups classroom situations. In R Crymes & J. Fanslow (eds.) On TESOL '76. Washington DC: TESOL.