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Communicative Performance in an EFL Country: Problems and Suggestions

Yoshiko Otsubo

0. This paper is primarily concerned with training for the communicative performance of English in Japanese English Education. It consists of three sections: in Section I, the main reasons for failure in acquiring the communicative performance in Japan will be discussed; in Section II, using “A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence” by Michael Canale, it is pointed out that English Education in Japan has emphasized only Grammatical Competence but not paid attention to communication at all; and in Section III, the role of Pragmatics in English Education of an EFL country will be discussed—it is suggested that English Education in an EFL country should incorporate useful information from Pragmatics as well as skills courses into the program.

I. By the communicative performance of English, it is meant that one has the ability to communicate with English speaking peoples by using English: it includes the ability of speaking and writing English, and also includes the ability of listening comprehension and reading comprehension of English. Since communication can be understood as the exchange of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, oral and written modes, and production and comprehension skills, these four skills in using English might be required to communicate with English speaking peoples.

English in this case, however, neither necessarily includes difficult words such as special technical terms, nor difficult expressions such as those in literary works. Rather I am thinking of English at the junior high school level in Japan, since the textbooks for junior high schools cover almost all basic English structures and a considerable number of idiomatic phrases and words. If we can command all of them, we will come to have enough abilities to communicate with English speaking peoples.

Unfortunately, English Education in Japan has not been successful in teaching these four skills, but it has been providing enough grammatical knowledge about English instead. In other words, it has been providing us with grammatical knowledge about English in order to develop skill in translating English into Japanese from the beginning course in junior high schools. From my personal experience as a learner and also as a teacher of English in Japan, however, it seems that these four skills in using English should be developed during junior and senior high schools: at least, the basic
training in the use of English should be provided in the beginning courses. This suggestion implies that we have to change the natural trend of English Education in Japan.

Thus my main concern in this paper is to answer the question: "Is there any possibility of acquiring skills in communicative performance of English during the junior and senior high school years in Japan?" Before answering this question, I would like to discuss the main reasons for failure to acquire these skills in Japan: If we know whether or not we can eliminate reasons for failure, we can easily find the answer.

In order to find the reasons for failure to acquire skills in communicative performance of English in Japan, it is very convenient to compare "English as a Foreign Language" (EFL) with "English as a Second Language" (ESL). The first and most crucial difference between EFL and ESL is that in an EFL country like Japan, people do not need English at all in their everyday life, whereas in ESL country, they need English to survive in the country. You might ask why they study English in an EFL country. The main reason for this, particularly in Japan, is that they have to pass highly competitive entrance examinations for the "famous" universities, in which English is a compulsory subject of the Liberal Arts Course. And in each academic field of Japanese universities, it is treated as an important instrument to obtain academic information from countries overseas.

Since the most important reason for studying English in Japanese universities is to get information from countries overseas through English books, it is natural that the traditional teaching method should be "Grammar-translation Method". And almost all the teachers of English at university level still use the "Grammar-Translation Method". On the other hand, the most typical reason why they need English in an ESL situation is to get a job in the country: they need practical skills in using English.

The second difference is that in an EFL situation, the knowledge about English is more emphasized in the English Education than the skills in using English, whereas in an ESL situation the skills in using English are more emphasized than the knowledge about English. The third difference is that teachers of English in an EFL situation (usually non-native speakers of English) are required to have grammatical knowledge about English including Linguistics and knowledge about English Literature, and skill in translating English into Japanese, but are not strongly required to have skills in using English; whereas English teachers in an ESL situation are usually native speakers of English, and are not required to have knowledge of the learners' native language nor skill in translating English into the learners' native Language.

By comparing the differences between an EFL situation and an ESL situation, we have been examining the reasons why English Education in an EFL situation like Japan has emphasized teaching knowledge about English but not developing the skills in using English. We can now show the main reasons for failure in Japan in acquiring the skills in using English: The most serious reason is that in an EFL country people
do not need English at all in everyday life. This leads to the following situation: it is not strongly required that English Education provide us with the skills courses. This is closely related to the following reason: Since the necessity of studying English is limited to the academic purpose of gaining information through English books, only courses in knowledge about English have been emphasized. Thus the incompletely trained teachers of English, who have studied only knowledge about English but have not been trained in the skills of using English, are allowed in Japan: This in the most serious problem in the English Education in Japan.

We can not change our situation from EFL to ESL. But we can change the teaching method from emphasizing knowledge courses to skills courses, even if Japan is an EFL country. There is no reason prohibiting the teaching of English as a communicative language; Rather the younger generation expect to learn English as a communicative language at schools. The problem is that most teachers of English cannot answer their expectations, because they were not trained in the skills of using English.

II. Since we are interested in the development of skills in using English at junior high schools, we will turn our attention to English Teachers' Training in Japan. There is an assumption: If teachers of English at junior and senior high schools are well trained at the teachers' colleges, they will be able to change the trend of English Education in Japan from emphasizing knowledge courses to focusing on skills course. Thus whether or not English Education in Japan will succeed in developing skills in the use of English at junior and senior high schools is dependent on the English Teachers' Training at the Teachers' Colleges. Since I have been working in the English Department of the Faculty of Education of Nagasaki University, I will discuss this topic from the viewpoint of a teachers' trainer. First of all, in order to make clear what aspects we have to add to the English language program for Teachers' Training Programs at Teachers' Colleges in Japan, I would like to introduce "A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence" proposed by Michael Canale. The essential aspects of his theoretical framework concern the nature of communication, the notions of communicative competence and communicative performance and the main components of communicative competence.

In the section on the nature of communication, he mentions that communication is understood to have the following characteristics:

(a) it is a form of social interaction, and thus includes expectations and meanings that must be continuously evaluated and negotiated by participants;
(b) it is involves unpredictability and creativity in form and message;
(c) it takes place in discourse and sociolinguistic contexts;
(d) it is carried out under performance limitations such as fatigue, memory constraints, and distractions;
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(e) it always has a purpose (for example, to establish social relation, to criticize, to persuade);
(f) it involves authentic, as opposed to textbook—contrived language;
(g) it is judged as successful or not on the basis of actual behavioral outcomes.

Since English has been treated as a dead language like Latin in Japan, our students can not easily realize that English can be used as a means of communication. And also they are usually asked to use a textbook—contrived language, so their communicative exercise in an English conversation class is predictable and uncreative in form and message. Thus we could say that English Education in Japan has not paid attention to any of the above characteristics; rather, it has completely disregarded them.

In the section on the notions of communicative competence and communicative performance, he gives the definitions of communicative competence and communicative performance:

**Communicative competence:**
the underlying systems of knowledge and skills required for communication; (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary and of sociolinguistic conventions for a second language.)

**Communicative performance:**
the realization of such knowledge and skills in actual communication situations under limiting psychological and environmental conditions, such as memory and perceptual constraints, fatigue, nervousness, distractions, and interfering background noises.

According to his definition, communicative competence refers to both knowledge and skill in using this knowledge under performance conditions, knowledge refers to what one knows about the language and about other aspects of communication, and skill refers to how well one can perform this knowledge in actual communication.

In the main components of communicative competence, he shows the four areas of knowledge and skill — (a) Grammatical competence, (b) Sociolinguistic competence, (c) Discourse competence, (d) Strategic competence — and explains each of them as follows:

(a) Grammatical competence remains concerned with mastery of vocabulary and rules of word formation, sentence formation, linguistic semantics, pronunciation and spelling. Thus someone who has achieved grammatical competence in a second language will have mastered the features and rules of language code itself. Such competence will be an important concern for any second language program whose goals include providing learners with the knowledge and skill required to understand and express accurately the literal meaning of utterance. (p. 6)

We could say that this Grammatical competence is just what English Education in
Japan has provided us in the program. It seems to me that English Education in Japan has been concerned with Grammatical competence only.

(b) Sociolinguistic competence addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of interaction, and norms of or conventions of interaction. Appropriateness of utterances refers to both appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of grammatical forms. Appropriateness of meaning concerns the extent to which particular communicative function (e.g., commanding, complaining, and inviting), attitudes (including politeness and formality) and ideas are judged to be proper in a given situation. Appropriateness of grammatical form concerns the extent to which a given meaning (including communicative functions, attitude and ideas) is represented in a grammatical form (and style) that in proper in a given sociolinguistic context. (p. 6)

This Sociolinguistic competence is the most difficult one to obtain in an EFL situation, although it is very crucial for learning English as a communicative language. There are no doubt universal aspects of sociolinguistic competence that need not be relearned to communicate appropriately in a foreign language, but it is also true that there are language and culture-specific aspects.

(c) Discourse competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical form and meaning to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres. By genre is meant the type of text: for example, oral and written narrative, an argumentative essays, a scientific report, a business letter, and a set of instructions each represent a different genre. Unity of a text is achieved through cohesion in form and coherence in meaning. Cohesion deals with how utterances are linked structurally and facilitates interpretation of a text. Coherence refers to the relationships among the different meanings in a text, where these meanings may be literal meanings, communicative functions and attitudes. (p. 8)

Japanese English Education can provide some parts of this competence which are based on the grammatical form and the literal meaning, but can not provide the parts of communicative functions and attitudes.

(d) Strategic competence is composed of mastery of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting factors in performance (e.g., momentary inability to recall an idea or grammatical form) or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other area of communicative competence. For example, when one does not remember a given grammatical form, one strategy that can be used
is paraphrase.... actual communication will also require learners to handle problems of a sociolinguistic nature (e.g., how to address strangers when unsure of their social status) and of a discourse nature (e.g., how to achieve coherence in a text when unsure of cohesion devices in the second language). (p. 10)

As for this Strategic competence, Japanese English Education can control only the grammatical problems but cannot deal with other problems of a sociolinguistic nature: Japanese English Education can control only Grammatical Competence very well among these four areas of knowledge and skill, but the Sociolinguistic Competence is the worst aspect for English Education in Japan. The grammatical forms and the literal meanings of Discourse competence and Strategic competence can be controlled in Japanese English Education, but the aspects of communicative functions and attitudes can not be.

It has become very clear that Japanese English Education has not paid attention to sociolinguistic aspects so far. This fact suggests that English Education in Japan should focus on sociolinguistic or pragmatic aspects as well as the skills courses in order to teach English as a communicative language.

For our convenince, we can examine the relation among Communicative Competence, Communicative Performance of ESL or EFL and English Education. Since we already have our own native language and have enough experience of communication in our own native language when we study EFL or ESL, we have communicative competence. In other words, we have both communicative competence and communicative performance in our native language, and thus we can transfer communicative competence to ESL or EFL. What we have to have in ESL or EFL education is the realization of communicative competence in ESL or EFL. The following diagram will show the relations:
Communicative competence can be defined as abstract underlying knowledge and skill of languages. Communicative competence and communicative performance according to Canale may be included in the communicative performance of ESL or EFL in this diagram. At the beginning of this paper, we have already defined communicative performance of English as the ability to communicate with English speaking peoples by using English. English Education provides Grammatical Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, Discourse Competence and Strategic Competence and skills courses for the realization of Communicative Performance of ESL or EFL.

III. 1. In my paper (1980), I have already mentioned that our English language program offered skills courses for our students who are future teachers of English, and showed Methodology and Material Design for the courses. I have also discussed how our skills courses are helpful for our students, who have passed the highly competitive entrance examination for the University: This may imply that Japanese students in general who have passed such an entrance examination for universities have enough knowledge about English, and they could rather easily develop skill in communicative performance of English if they were trained in such skills courses.

We should notice that there are some limitations in the skills courses in an EFL situation, however. Students in an EFL situation can only create grammatical sentences, because they are trained only in grammatical skills but not trained in sociolinguistic skill as we have pointed out above. They create grammatical sentences and react to the literal meaning of the grammatical sentences. They have difficulties in reacting to the contextual meaning or the non-literal meaning of utterances. For example, suppose that a Japanese student whose skills in using English were developed in Japan was invited to a party of an American family. If the hostess said to him, "Why don't you sit down?", then he would answer, "Because...", even if there is no reason to mention. English grammar books teach us to do like this: If you are asked with "Why...?", then you should answer with "Because...". Information about the use of English is rather easily obtained through experience in English speaking countries, but in an EFL country nobody tells it. This is the reason why Japanese English Education should incorporate sociolinguistic or pragmatic aspects of English into the program.

2. In this section I would like to mention how helpful information from Pragmatics is in learning the relation between language use and social contexts. Though Sociolinguistics and Pragmatics are both interested in language use in social contexts, it seems that they are different from each other in their approach. In the former the social situation is more emphasized than language itself, whereas, in the latter, language itself is more emphasized than the social situation in which it occurs. In other words, Pragmatics is the linguistic approach which we are interested in here. Let us have some examples to show the information from Pragmatics. Firstly, we will
discuss the indirectness of speech acts. The following examples can often be used in ordinary English conversation:

1. Will you take out the garbage?
2. Can you tell us the way to the station?
3. Do you know who lives next door to you?
4. Why don’t you come with me?
5. Why do you paint your house purple?
6. Is it cold in here?

The literal meanings of all of these examples are questions; however, they have at least one implied meaning in each situation: Sentence (1) and (2) are usually understood as requests, and are equivalent to the following sentences (1’) and (2’), respectively.

1’. I request you to take out the garbage.
2’. I request you to tell us the way to the station.

(1’) and (2’) are very clear direct request forms, which can be called illocutionary acts, and sentence (3) has two more interpretations, i.e., (3’) (3”), besides its literal meaning:

3’. If you don’t know who lives next door to you, I’ll tell you.
3”. I request you to tell me who lives next door to you.

(3’) is a suggestion and (3”) a request. Sentence (4) is also interpreted as advice besides its literal meaning:

4’. I advise you to come with me.

The context in which it is uttered usually decides whether or not it is advice. Sentence (5) also has another meaning besides its literal meaning: It can be interpreted as advice.

5’. I’m telling you not to paint your house purple.

When sentence (5) conveys the non-literal meaning (5’), do you can be deleted. This means that “Why paint your house purple?” conveys only one meaning (5’). Sentence (6) can be interpreted as a request, i.e., (6’) besides its literal meaning:

6’. I request you to turn up the heat.
In this example, the context in which it occurs has an important role in deciding the meaning: Suppose that A visited B's home; A had a cold and felt cold in the room, and he uttered (6). In such a situation, the question form (6) can be interpreted as a request. This kind of speech act can be called a Perlocutionary act which means that the cooperation of the hearer has an important role. Sometimes the hearer can not react to what the speaker intended, or he can intentionally avoid reacting to what the speaker intended.

The important point here is why the Americans use such indirect expressions instead of using the corresponding direct ones: this is crucial for learning English as a communicative language. The following rules, which were proposed by Robin Lakoff, will explain this:

7. Rules of Pragmatics:
   a. Be clear.
   b. Be polite.

8. Rules of Politeness:
   a. Don't impose.
   b. Give options.
   c. Make A feel good.... Be friendly.

The order of these rules does not indicate the priority of the rules. "Be polite." in the Rules of Pragmatics has priority over "Be clear." in middle class American society: Here we can find the reason why Americans use indirect expressions such as these examples mentioned above: i.e., they follow the rule, "Be polite." We can also learn a basic idea about Politeness in American society: In the Rules of Politeness, "Don't impose." and "Give options." seem to be different from culture to culture.

Secondly, we touch on the concepts of Speech Acts proposed by J. L. Austin, which are also very useful for learning English as a communicative language. In the following Examples, (9) and (10) are perlocutionary requests and (11) is an illocutionary request:

9. A : Are you going home?
   B : Sorry, my car's full.
10. A : It is cold in here.
    B : Ok, I'll turn up the heat.
11. A : Will you please turn up the heat?
    B : OK.

The difference between a Perlocutionary request and an Illocutionary request can be informally explained as follows: In a Perlocutionary request, the speaker's intention
is indirectly expressed and the hearer's cooperation has an important role, for example, as in (10). That is, the hearer's utterance "OK, I'll turn up the heat." shows how he cooperated with the indirect request. In an Illocutionary request, the speaker's intention is directly expressed, and thus the hearer can say only "OK" or "Sure" or "All right" as in (11). It is not my purpose here to describe the difference between Illocutionary Acts and Perlocutionary Acts.

These examples suggest that information from Pragmatics should be incorporated in the Materials and Methodology in English Education in an EFL situation. Now I can answer the question, "Is there any possibility of acquiring skill in communicative performance of English during the junior and senior high school years in Japan?"; my answer is "Yes, there is a possibility." if we produce well-trained teachers of English in such a program as I suggested here. I can tell that we are producing well trained teachers of English in our program: we have already trained many qualified teachers of English, and they are already working in junior and senior high schools in Japan. They have enough energy and skill in teaching English as a communicative language against the trend of the old teaching method in Japan.

Since I am Japanese, I have mentioned only the Japanese situation so far. The problems I pointed out in this paper, however, may be shared in other EFL countries. Thus I believe that the suggestions I have made here will be useful for those countries.

NOTES:
2. The syllabus for senior high school in Japan is to be revised within a few years, so that English as a communicative language will be emphasized.

Selected Bibliography:
6. Buckley, P., V. Samuda and A. Bruton. 1978. "Sensitising the learner to group work; A


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N. B. The first draft of this paper was written as a term paper for ESL 730, Seminar (Spring 1981) at the Department of English as a Second Language, the University of Hawaii, which was instructed by Dr. Richard W. Schmidt.

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