

原 著

The Implementation of “English Communication I ” Incorporating the New Course of Study for Senior High Schools in Japan

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<Abstract>

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) revised the Course of Study, which serves as curriculum guidelines for senior high schools in Japan in 2009. The new guidelines will be implemented in April, 2013 and require teachers to conduct English classes primarily in English. This paper describes English language education in Japanese senior high schools and some points of the new Course of Study which have been changed from the last one. It also examines teachers' thinking about using English to conduct their classes, what hinders the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into senior high schools in Japan, and several textbooks approved by MEXT for use under the new Course of Study. Some teaching ideas to incorporate the objectives of the new Course of Study are presented.

Keywords: teaching English through English, the new Course of Study, CLT, English Communication I , teachers' beliefs

I. Introduction

The Course of Study, educational guidelines for elementary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools, was released by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (as it was known at that time) in 1947 and has since been revised about every ten years. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) revised the guidelines for elementary schools and junior high schools in 2008 and those for high schools in 2009. The new Course of Study for elementary and the one for junior high schools have already been implemented. “Foreign Language Activities” became compulsory for fifth and sixth grade students. The number of words to be taught in English classes was greatly increased as well as the contact hours of

teaching English, which increased from three to four hours a week in junior high schools. The new Course of Study for senior high schools will be implemented in April, 2013. It encourages teachers to teach English through English in order to give students more exposure to the target language and the number of words to be taught also increased. The impact of this drastic change has caused nation-wide discussion about teaching English through English and some high school teachers seem to worry about how they should conduct their classes under the new Course of Study.

This study examines the present situation of English classes in senior high schools in Japan and the attitude of English teachers of senior high schools toward the new Course of Study, especially the concept of “teaching English

through English." It also offers some examples of teaching "English Communication I," which is a compulsory subject for senior high school students, incorporating the objectives of the new Course of Study.

II. English Language Education in Japanese Senior High Schools

1. Grammar Translation Method

MEXT has never recommended the Grammar Translation Method (GT) in the Course of Study (Nishino, 2011); however, Gorsuch (1998) found through her survey of Japanese high school teachers of English that 70 to 80 % of them used GT. Entrance examinations have a strong effect on the teaching practice in Japan (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Nishino, 2008) and they do not emphasize oral communication (Stewart, 2009). Teachers believe that grammar, vocabulary, and yakudoku, translating English sentences into Japanese, are important for passing entrance examinations (Nishino, 2008). Some people believe that GT enhances students' competence in English, but it might be because this method forces students to study hard outside the classroom (Kanatani, 2011). GT does not produce students who can use English but only those who can explain English rules (Suzuki, 2007). The long-term use of GT might be one of the reasons why English language education in Japan has not produced many competent speakers of English.

2. The Course of Study

MEXT (1999) started to especially emphasize fostering students' communicative competence in English in 1989, with an officially revised Course of Study, but it didn't have a great impact on English language teaching, particularly in senior high schools (Kanatani, 2011). There is a gap between the goals of the Course of Study and teachers' practice in their classroom (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Nishino, 2008, 2011; Sakui, 2004; Stewart, 2009; Tahira,

2012; Yoshida, 2003). Many teachers adopt GT in teaching English in their classroom even though MEXT requires them to focus on students' communicative competence. The Course of Study specifies the content teachers should teach, but not the instruction method they should use to teach it (Gorsuch, 2000) and teachers often do not pay much attention to it (Nishino, 2011). As mentioned above, entrance examinations have a great impact on teachers' classroom practice and the skills necessary for passing examinations are very different from the objectives of the Course of Study. So, teachers adapt the Course of Study to university entrance test preparation (Gorsuch, 2000). Teachers develop their individual teaching style from their own experience and observing others' teaching practice, not from the Course of Study (Nishino, 2011).

Since 1989, teachers have been required to enhance students' communicative competence although most of them were never taught in communicative way when they themselves were high school students (Nishino, 2011). The educational background of teachers is another area that impacts on their teaching practice (Watanabe, 1996; Watzke, 2007) and teachers tend to teach in the same way that they were taught at school. Gorsuch (2000) states that teachers' instruction is remarkably stable. If MEXT expects teachers to foster students' communicative competence, they should address methods of instruction in the Course of Study (Nishino, 2008, 2011).

III. The Impact of the New Course of Study

1. The New Course of Study for Senior High Schools

The new Course of Study for senior high schools to be implemented in 2013 differs from the previous one in several significant ways. One of them is that the subjects are reorganized

and a new subject, "English Communication I," is now compulsory (MEXT, 2009). In "English Communication I," "the four areas of language activities should be interlinked for comprehensive learning, while incorporating appropriate language activities involving speaking and writing about content heard or read." Grammatical items should be taught in "English Communication I" and those items "should be appropriately introduced by linking them effectively with language activities." As for vocabulary, the number of words to be taught in high school has increased to about 3,000, up from around 2,200 in the previous Course of Study. The revision that has received the spotlight is that "classes, in principle, should be conducted in English in order to enhance the opportunities for students to be exposed to English, transforming classes into real communication scenes."

In elementary schools, "Foreign Language Activities" are taught with an emphasis on listening and speaking in order to ground the students' communicative competence, and in junior and senior high schools teachers are required to teach English in a more communicative way. These revisions show that MEXT is putting more emphasis on fostering students' communicative competence. In order to implement the new Course of Study, CLT should be introduced into classes. Learners acquire a language by understanding input, which is a little beyond their competence (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Output is also necessary for learners to acquire a language (Swain, 1985). If teachers provide the students with sufficient comprehensible input and output through CLT, students will have more chances to improve their language competence. Willis (1981) states, "Language is much better learnt through real use than through pattern drills and exercises." (p.1)

2. What do high school teachers think about teaching English through English?

In July, 2012, the author conducted a survey to investigate Japanese high school teachers' practice and beliefs regarding teaching English through English (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, in press). The research questionnaires were sent or directly handed to teachers in the Kansai and Fukuoka areas of Japan. Ninety-five teachers joined this survey and they were all native speakers of Japanese teaching English in public senior high schools. Major findings of this survey are:

- (1) In "Oral Communication I," 12 out of 64 teachers (18.8 %) use English in most of the class and 18 teachers (28.1 %) use it for more than half of the class.
- (2) In "English I," none of 79 teachers (0.0%) use English in most of the class and only 8 teachers (10.1 %) use it for more than half of the class.
- (3) Seventy-two percent of the teachers conduct classroom instructions and greetings in English.
- (4) Less than 10 % of the teachers conduct grammar explanation and grammar practice in English.
- (5) Six out of 94 teachers (6.3%) strongly approve of MEXT's policy of "teaching English through English" and 52 teachers (55.3%) somewhat agree with the policy.
- (6) Twenty-nine out of 94 teachers (30.9%) somewhat disagree with "teaching English through English" and 7 teachers (7.4%) strongly disagree with the policy.
- (7) One out of 95 teachers (1.1%) strongly agrees that it easy to conduct English classes in English in their school setting, 26 teachers (27.4%) somewhat agree, 51 teachers (53.7%) somewhat disagree and 17 teachers (17.9%) strongly disagree.
- (8) More than half of the teachers who agree with question 7 mentioned students' sufficient competence in English as the reason for their approval of teaching

English in English.

- (9) Most of the teachers who disagree with question 7 referred to students' insufficient competence in English as the reason for their disagreement with teaching English in English.
- (10) To the question "Do you think teaching English through English is effective in developing your students' competence in using English?" 15 out of 92 teachers (16.3%) strongly agree, 52 teachers (56.5%) somewhat agree, 21 teachers (22.8%) somewhat disagree, and 4 teachers (4.3%) strongly disagree.

Not many teachers conducted their classes in English, but more than half of them approved of the idea of teaching English in English. Another study showed a similar result: 75 out of 139 Japanese high school teachers (54.0%) approved of CLT but few of them had implemented it in their own lessons (Nishino, 2011). Although there are some obstacles to teaching in a communicative way, teachers' beliefs about their teaching style might gradually be changing (Gorsuch, 2000; Nishino, 2008; Taguchi, 2005).

The author also investigated what Japanese high school teachers think is necessary to make English classes through English successful (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, in press). Sixteen out of 95 teachers (16.8%) wanted entrance examinations to be changed. Some researchers state that entrance examinations have a great influence on teachers' beliefs and hinder the implementation of CLT (Brown & Yamashita, 1995; Gorsuch, 2000; Sakui, 2004). Thirteen teachers (13.7%) answered that textbooks should be improved to make it easier to teach English through English. Textbooks are too difficult in many cases (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009) and it is hard to do CLT with textbooks whose level is much higher than that of the students. Twelve teachers (12.6%) would like to have a model of teaching English through English. The

Course of Study does not show the method of teaching and this might prevent teachers from conducting their lessons in English. Twelve teachers (12.6%) felt in-service training is necessary. According to Nishino's study (2011), 60% of high school teachers approved of in-service training for CLT. MEXT and the board of education in each local government provide teachers with in-service training, but researchers state that more training programs are necessary (Fennelly & Luxton, 2011; Nishino, 2011, Tahira, 2012). Eleven out of 95 teachers (11.6%) think that changes in classroom settings are necessary. Six of them think the class size is too big for communicative activities. Others would like to have educational devices in their classroom or school such as an electronic blackboard, audiovisual apparatus, Wi-Fi, and computers for each student to use. One of them answered, "If we can provide more English class hours with the students, I would like to teach English through English." Another teacher wrote, "Each teacher should have fewer classes in order to have more time to prepare for the class." Nishino (2008) states "in order to employ CLT in their classrooms, teachers feel that a change in classroom conditions is a prerequisite." School and classroom conditions have an impact on teacher perceptions concerning CLT (Gorsuch, 2000). Seven out of 95 teachers (7.4%) think consensus among teachers is necessary to change their teaching style. They seem to believe they should talk with their colleagues in order for all of the English teachers of their school to teach English through English. One of them wrote, "Not only English teachers but also the teachers of other subjects should have the same belief for English; it is a subject to gain knowledge or one to acquire some skills". Four teachers (4.2%) answered that students should master basic skills in junior high school. They seem to feel that it is difficult to teach English through English to students who have not mastered what they are supposed to have learned in junior high school. Four teachers

(4.2%) thinks ALTs are important for teaching English through English. One of them wrote, "I hope that an ALT is always at a class to support me." Another teacher wrote, "I hope that MEXT or a board of education show us on the Internet how to make best use of ALTs in order to teach English through English."

3. Textbooks

Textbooks for elementary schools, junior high schools and senior high schools in Japan must be approved by MEXT. The textbooks approved for use under the existing Course of Study (MEXT, 1999) by MEXT have some communicative activities but mainly consist of reading texts such as stories, articles and essays. These textbooks seem to be more suitable for GT, rather than CLT. Teachers feel the need for changes in textbooks in order to incorporate the guidelines of the new Course of Study (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, in press).

There are many different kinds of textbooks for senior high schools in Japan and they are roughly divided into three groups: ones for advanced students who wish to go to topnotch universities, those for intermediate students, and those for basic students. The textbooks in the first group are often small in size but contain many reading texts and the fonts used are very small. The second group of books is often middle-sized, while the third group is large-sized but contains few reading texts and a much bigger font is used. All these textbooks were revised to meet the new guidelines and must be approved by MEXT; they will be released for use in senior high schools in April, 2013.

The author examined 13 textbooks for "English Communication I" which were approved by MEXT under the new Course of Study and found some changes in them compared with textbooks for "English I," which is a compulsory subject in the existing Course of

Study. Divided into the three groups mentioned above, one of them is for advanced students, ten are for intermediate students, and two are for basic students. Twelve of them consist mainly of reading texts, such as stories, articles and essays, which are similar to the traditional texts, but one of them, *Atlantis English Communication I* (Mitchell et al, 2012) is very different from the others. This textbook is more similar to ones used for ESL and provides many tasks and activities. The number of pages in this textbook is also different from others; there are 294 pages in this one, while the others have only 127 to 208 pages. This book has the most communicative activities, while others have only a few more than the existing textbooks. Seven of them provide typical English expressions used in a classroom at the beginning or end of the book. This is useful when classes are conducted in English. If a student does not understand the teacher's utterances or does not know what to say in English, the teacher can point to an appropriate expression on the list. This could facilitate the use of English in the classroom. Most of the instructions in five of the textbooks are written in English. In three of them, explanation of photos and graphs are written in English. Only a few parts are written in Japanese, such as grammatical terms, background knowledge for each article or story, questions about English compositions and explanation for comprehension. The English instructions in the textbooks are very helpful for both teachers and students because teachers can use them when they give students instructions and students can read them even if they cannot catch what a teacher says. One of them, *New Stream English Communication I* (Takashima et al, 2012), provides Japanese translation for the English instructions. These translations might be helpful for students whose ability of English is not high enough. This textbook also provides Japanese translations for some words and phrases in the optional readings. These are also helpful for students to

read more texts without taking time to consult a dictionary. One of the books, *Genius English Communication I* (Muranai et al, 2012), provides additional readings for each lesson and these readings have the same topic as each lesson. It makes the number of pages of this textbook the highest in other books except for *Atlantis English Communication I*. It might be easier for students to read the additional readings after studying each lesson because the vocabulary used in the text might be similar to the words they have already learned in the lesson and they can use the knowledge they have previously learned. The teachers' manual of one textbook, *My Way English Communication I* (Morisumi et al, 2012), provides some useful ideas for teachers to conduct their classes in English. For example, it shows teaching plans for classes conducted in English. Basic classroom English and objectives and background knowledge of each lesson are also provided in English. These lesson plans show some examples of teachers' utterances in English. These things will promote teachers' use of more English in their class.

IV. Ideas for Teaching English Communication I

The Course of Study has promoted the fostering of students' communicative competence since 1989, but many teachers have clung to traditional teaching methods, such as GT. Although they approved of CLT, there is a gap between the Course of Study and their practice. This is because there are many obstacles which prevent teachers from introducing CLT into their classes, such as entrance examinations, textbooks, lack of models for teaching in a communicative way, few chances for in-service training, and classroom settings. In this section, some ideas for teaching "English Communication I" are presented. In order to incorporate the objectives of the new Course of Study, teaching plans that place communicative

activities in the center of a lesson are required. They should be simple so that any teacher can adopt them for his/her classroom and adapt them to any level of students.

1. Listening

- (1) Example 1: Listening for the gist
- Listening activities are appropriate when new material is introduced. If the material is not very difficult for students, listening for the gist might be a suitable activity.
- ① Give students one or two questions before listening to a text.
 - ② Have students listen to the text.
 - ③ Ask students the questions again. Have them listen to the text again if necessary.
 - ④ Have students answer the questions.
 - ⑤ Have students listen to it again to check the answers.

If students' English ability is not so high, yes/no questions are more suitable.

- (2) Example 2: Choose a word which is heard
- If the material is difficult for students or it is hard for them to concentrate on listening for a while, this will be a suitable activity. Students have something to do every few seconds and they will not be bored.
- ① Hand out a worksheet printed with a reading text from a textbook and some brackets which have two words in them.
 - ② Have students choose the word which is heard while listening to a text.
 - ③ Have students listen to it several times.
 - ④ Check the answers.
 - ⑤ Have students listen to it again to check the answers.

If this activity is done at the end of the class, a teacher can ask students to write a word in the blanks without giving them choices.

These listening activities provide students with a wide exposure to English. The University Center Examinations, which many high school

students who would like to go to university take, introduced a listening section in 2006, so listening activities are becoming more important in English language education at senior high schools.

2. Reading

Textbooks for English Communication I mainly consist of reading texts. It is most important for teachers to make a teaching plan using these texts. Teachers are required to give up GT in order to incorporate the objectives of the new Course of Study.

(1) Example 3: Questions and answers after reading

- ① Hand students a worksheet which has questions about a reading passage in their textbook and have them write the answers on the worksheet as a homework assignment.
- ② Have students write their answer on the blackboard and check the answers.
- ③ If there are new grammatical items in a question or an answer, explain it. If necessary, speak in Japanese to help students understand the grammar point or meaning.

If students' competence in English is not high, questions should be simple ones such as yes/no questions. If students' English ability is high, a teacher can ask them questions which do not have literal answers in the reading text in order to foster their ability to read between the lines.

3. Speaking

GT takes too much time to explain grammatical rules and provides students with little chance to use the language. Students need opportunity to use a language in order to become proficient in it. In example 3, a teacher does not translate all of the sentences, so they can have time to do other activities, such as

example 4, using the same text and giving students more chances to use English.

(1) Example 4: Question and answers in pairs

- ① Have students ask and answer the questions on the worksheet used in example 3 in pairs. One student asks questions on the sheet and the other answers them without seeing the sheet. The student who is asked questions can see the textbook while answering.
- ② When students finish asking and answering the questions on the sheet, have them change roles.
- ③ Have some of the students answer the questions in front of the class.

Asking and answering questions is not authentic communication because there is no actual exchange of information. Students already know the answers, but this activity lets them practice speaking the language before using it in a real situation. The listening, reading and speaking activities above give students more and repeated input of the text, while GT gives them only a few chances to read it during the class.

4. Writing

Under the existing Course of Study there is a subject which focuses on writing, but under the new Course of Study there is no such subject and it is supposed to be taught integrated with other skills such as listening, reading, and speaking. This activity has students write an essay after they learn listening, reading and speaking using the same text and they can acquire the four skills gradually by using the same text repeatedly. Teachers can also focus on certain grammatical items from other activities as well in this one.

(1) Example 7: Essay writing

- ① Pick a topic and grammatical items from the reading text which students learned in

the previous lesson and have them write an essay about it. The essay should include the grammatical items.

- ② After a certain time, collect the sheet and check them.

Teachers do not have to check all of the mistakes, but only certain grammatical items they would like to focus on. Then, it does not take much time to check the students' essays. It is recommended to have students write a certain number of words for an essay in a certain amount of time. Students might write less than required at an early stage, but they will get accustomed to writing more through doing this repeatedly.

5. Additional activity

The activities above are divided into four groups: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, but they do not focus on just one skill area, instead they emphasize one area while integrating the other skills. Example 8 is an activity designed for students to use the four skills interlinked effectively in an authentic situation. In EFL settings, it is difficult to provide students with opportunities for real communication in the target language. They have few chances to use English outside their classroom. Even in their classroom, their teacher and classmates are usually speakers of Japanese and it is not natural to talk to each other in English. It is ideal for students to have an authentic situation to use English and it is possible if you use the Internet. You need a computer with a camera and a microphone built in, Internet access, and social networking software, such as Skype. Using this equipment you can connect a classroom to the world and allow students an authentic language experience. Example 8 is an activity using the Internet to have a web conference with foreign students. Students who participate in this activity will speak more English and play a more active role in all their classes, not just the web conference lessons (Tsukamoto, Nuspliger & Senzaki, 2009).

(1) Example 8: Web conference

- ① Divide students into groups of around six and give each group a topic for a presentation during a web conference.
- ② Have students prepare for the presentation as an assignment.
- ③ During class, hold a web conference with foreign students and have each group give their presentation. If foreign students have questions, have students answer them.
- ④ Listen to presentations by foreign students and have students ask questions to them.
- ⑤ After the web conference, have students write about what they learned from the presentation of the foreign students and send their comments to the teacher of the other school.

This activity gives more opportunities to use English not only to students but also to teachers. When teachers prepare for a web conference, they have to exchange emails with the teacher of the foreign school in English. Through this communication, they can improve their English skills. Many teachers do not have enough time to enhance their English language skills because they get busier year after year (Terashima, 2009). However, teachers with less English competency could be a hindrance to the implementation of CLT (Nunan, 2003). Therefore teachers can make use of their lesson preparation time as a time for their own learning when they do web conferences.

V. Conclusion

It is often difficult to introduce teaching methodologies developed in the West, such as CLT (Li, 1998). Few teachers adopt CLT in their classes in Japan, although many of them approve of it. The new Course of Study requires senior high school teachers to conduct classes in English in principle. This study shows some examples of activities for senior high school English classes to incorporate the

guidelines of the new Course of Study.

More than half of the teachers approve of "teaching English through English," as proposed in the new Course of Study, although there are many obstacles (Tsukamoto & Tsujioka, in press). Further research will be desirable after the new Course of Study is implemented in 2013 in order to understand what hinders the introduction of CLT into Japanese high schools and how these obstacles can be overcome. There must be an appropriate style of CLT which is suitable to the educational settings in Japan.

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高等学校新学習指導要領を具現化する 「コミュニケーション英語Ⅰ」の指導

塚本 美紀

〈要 旨〉

文部科学省は2009年に高等学校学習指導要領を告示した。これは2013年4月から実施されることとなっており、教員は英語の授業を基本的に英語で行うことが要求されている。本稿では日本の高等学校の英語教育の実態を述べるとともに今回の改訂で変更された新学習指導要領のいくつかの要点を示す。また、英語で授業を行うことについて日本人英語教師がどのように考えているか、コミュニケーション・ランゲージ・ティーチングを日本の高等学校で実施することの障害となっているものは何か、そして新学習指導要領のもとで使用されることとなる文部科学省によって検定された教科書について分析する。最後に新学習指導要領の目的を具現化するための指導案をいくつか提示する。

キーワード：英語の授業は英語で、新学習指導要領、コミュニケーション・ランゲージ・ティーチング、
コミュニケーション英語Ⅰ、教員の信念