Title
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An Essential Role of Writing a Personal Impression after Reading a Text in Cultivating L2 Learners' Communicative Ability

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"Communication" in a situation of teaching/learning a foreign language (English) seems to be understood with only two terms: speaker and hearer. Natural communication hasn't been closely observed by Japanese English teachers yet. Therefore, Japanese college students still have great difficulty in English communication even after having a lot of practice in English conversation. The greatest problem for them is that they cannot continue their conversation.

"Communication" actually has several levels in terms of continuation as well as other factors. This paper pursues mainly those levels in spoken communication and written communication. Observing the levels of the two types of communication, you will know what makes people continue the communication in which they are involved. Comparing the two types, you will also come to realize that a lot of writing exercises after reading texts could be a useful practice for Japanese college students to develop their communicative ability in the target language (English).

1. Introduction

The most attractive role of language is that it enables a person to arrive at an understanding with others about a matter. If people establish mutual understanding by language, they will have fewer problems; rather, they will cooperate with each other to solve the problem they have. To understand each other, people have to interchange their thoughts adequately. In this case a verbal exchange will last till they reach a mutually satisfactory conclusion.

Japanese college students seem poor in following the sequence of conversation in their target language (English). Their utterances are not connected with each other. Each utterance has one topic. They tend to jump to another topic without developing one particular topic. Therefore, their conversation doesn't last long. They can converse with others on a topic only superficially without really exchanging their thoughts. Therefore, they have never
experienced real mutual understanding with people from overseas at all.

In order to help Japanese college students to develop their communicative ability in the English language, this paper examines two points about continuous communication: (1) to find out what makes people continue communication, (2) to find out what is an adequate practice for Japanese college students to be able to continue their communication.

2. Levels of Natural Communication

Japanese English teachers have to know how natural communication in spoken form as well as written form is manipulated if they want to help their students with communication in the English language. If one closely observes natural communication, one will notice there is a certain mechanism in it. The writer tries to reveal the mechanism providing several levels of communication in terms of continuation. The level is determined by frequency of the two terms: “message sender” and “message receiver”. Sometimes one person takes the two different roles. “Talking to oneself” is one example and “reading his own notes” is another example. The mechanism of continuation in natural communication will also point to some similarities between spoken communication and written communication.

(1) The Case of Spoken Communication

(a) Levels of Spoken Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 Person A: to send a message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person B: to receive the message but not to give any response to Person A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The type of communication shown above happens if Person A’s message is too difficult for Person B, or if Person B thinks that Person A’s message doesn’t have any meaning to Person B, or Person B responds with “I don’t know.” The communication ends there. The students should be encouraged to avoid this type of communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Person A: to send a message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person B: to receive the message and respond to it with Yes/No, or simple action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example

A: May I use your pen?
B: Yes, you may.
( or action of offering the pen )

The communication of level 2 can be observed everywhere, especially in an English class. The teacher asks a question or makes a request, and the students answer with “Yes,” or “No,”
or a student's action follows the teacher's request. Other people, besides students in class, also tend to have the same type of communication when they are with a native speaker of English. The native speaker of English asks them something and they answer him with a simple sentence. They never try to go further, so their communication finishes after a few exchanges. Therefore, this type of communication is not good communication either in terms of continuation. The students shouldn't stay at this level if they are to be able to interchange their thoughts with native speakers of English.

Table 3

Level 3  Person A: to send a message

(1) : to receive the message and respond to it with his OPINION ( and action )

Person B

(2) : to send a message

• mechanical opinion
• thoughtful opinion

( = )

Person A

(1) : to receive the message and respond to it with his OPINION

(2) : to send a message ( = )

Level 3 shows a desirable communication. At level 3 Person B ( Person B (1) ) responds to Person A with his opinion or sometimes his response is accompanied with an action. This response with his opinion turns into a message at the same time. So Person B now works as a message sender ( Person B (2) ). Next, Person A becomes the message receiver ( Person A (1) ). If Person A responds to Person B with his opinion, and if this type of back and forth verbal exchange keeps going, the communication continues. Japanese college students should be led up to this level so that they can really interchange their thoughts on a certain topic.

(b) Contents of OPINION

A person has to express his opinion in level 3 in order to respond to the message which he has received. The opinion is not always one type. There are two types of opinion at least, as shown in Table 3: mechanical opinion and thoughtful opinion.

An example of the communication with mechanical opinion is as follows:

Person A ( sender ): Would you open the door ?

(1, receiver ): Certainly. ( and action of opening the door )

Person B

(2, sender ): ( Certainly. ) ( and action of opening the door )
If one observes the above conversation carefully, one will recognize that mechanical opinion is the opinion expressed with set phrases similar to greeting types which can be learned by memorization work. In other words, the opinion sentences are short enough to be memorized.

The following sample conversation is one with thoughtful opinion:

Person A (sender): Megumi, did you hear the news about PKO?
Person B (1 = 2): Yes, I did. When I heard the Japanese government finally decided to legalize PKO, I felt a fear of war.
Person A (1 = 2): A fear of war! I can’t understand you. PKO means Peace Keeping Organization, so it is an organization for keeping world peace.
Person B (1 = 2): If the world were already at peace, we would not need PKO. But there are so many countries where there is war. The Japanese government has been asked to send some Defence Force personnel under the name of PKF to Kampuchea where people are suffering from war. I am sure PKF will definitely get into the war. They may lose their life on the battlefield.
Person A (1 = 2): No. They don’t fight. If they fight, they won’t be a peace-keeping organization at all. People can’t be so silly. Their duty is to help the wounded. .......

The above example shows that thoughtful opinion is the opinion expressed with the message receiver’s created phrases or sentences which cannot be learned through memorization work. Because the sentences are created by the message receiver based on the things in his mind, no teacher can teach these sentences as set phrases (sentences).

Japanese college students seem to desire to have this type of conversation with English speaking people. However, they don’t know how to achieve this. Japanese English teachers must be sensitive enough to catch their WANTS and be able to lead them up to level 3.

(2) The case of Written Communication

This section examines how people interact with written language (books, letters, reports, compositions, etc.) in terms of continuation.
(a) Levels of Written Communication

Table 4

| Level 1 | A (reading material) : to send a message | B (reader) : to receive the message (but no response) |

The message (= reading material) doesn't have any response from the reader at this level. It means that the message might be too difficult for the reader or it doesn't have any meaning to the reader.

Table 5

| Level 2 | A (reading material) : to send a message | B (reader) : to receive the message and to get into the reading material |

Level 2 shows that the message is well received and the reader gets into the world of the reading material. This phenomenon often happens to us when we read an interesting book, such as a novel. The reader identifies himself as the hero or heroine of the novel, but he doesn't express his opinion.

Table 6

| Level 3 | A (material) : to send a message | B (reader) : to receive the message and to respond to it with his sense of values (= opinion) (agree or disagree with what the reading material says) |

The mechanism at level 3 can be observed in the following case. We often have an experience in responding to the reading material while we are reading. Sometimes it is just like talking to oneself. When the sentences stimulate us, we tend to agree with what the sentences describe or to disagree in the light of our own sense of values which has been cultivated in our surroundings or culture. In this situation we can really enjoy reading very much. This type of reading is called Top-Down Reading, which encourages the reader to use his culture as a framework with which he can capture the total scene described in the book, while Bottom-Up Reading requires the reader to pay attention to the meaning of each word. There's no doubt that it's far better to evoke the reader's culture which he has stored in his mind to activate himself in a situation of learning the English language than to consult a dictionary in order to check every word in the book.
Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>A (material): to send a message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (reader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) : to receive the message and to summarize it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) : to send a message ( )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level 4 shows that the message receiver will take a note or summarize the message if he thinks the message is very important and doesn't want to forget it. The note or the summarization can turn into a message but neither of them has the message receiver's opinion at all. However, the act of note taking or summarizing can be undertaken only if the message receiver understands the message. If he cannot understand the message, he won't be able to take a note or summarize it. To understand the message is surely the most fundamental thing in communication.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>A (material): to send a message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (reader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) : to receive the message and to respond to it with his opinion (personal impression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) : to send a message ( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: to receive the message (with his sense of values)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At level 5, Person B responds to the reading material with his opinion, and he has a chance to write what his opinion is in what can be called a personal impression. It might be better to explain how a person develops his opinion here. It's generally understood that each person has his own sense of values. His sense of values has grown in his surroundings, and it has been influenced by friends, culture, weather, politics, economics, etc. In the light of his sense of values he can say a thing is good or bad. Therefore, it can be said that his opinion comes from right there, his sense of values.

At this same level, Person B writes about what he has read based on his sense of values. This personal impression now becomes a message which will be read by others besides Person B. They might include Person A who originally wrote the reading material. Person C or A might agree with Person B or disagree. The reading work no longer keeps the reader only as the reader. The reader has turned into a message sender.
Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 6</th>
<th>A (material): to send a message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (reader)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) to receive the message and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to respond to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with his sense of values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>repeated (letter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A (reader): to receive the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>message and to respond to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with his sense of values</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level 6 shows the mechanism of exchanging letters. At this level the communication of sending a message and responding to it keeps going. So, the communication continues. This mechanism is just the same as the one at level 3 in spoken communication. So, Japanese college students have to be encouraged to have a pen pal and exchange letters as often as possible. A Japanese English teacher might be too busy to do this with his many students.

(b) The Message Receiver's Action

In written communication, as it has been observed, if a message receiver (reader) turns into a message sender, he or she is forced to write. (Sometimes he will be a speaker, in which case he is not a written communicator, so that is ignored here.) To write English sentences in order to express his opinion, he needs to know what writing is. Writing exercises really help students to organize their thought. Mr. Otagaki says that if a Japanese wants to be a fluent English speaker, he needs to have a drill of writing. The drill should be rapid writing. The person who studies only spoken English won't be a good communicator because he rarely has an opportunity to be in an English environment outside his English class. In this kind of rapid writing exercise, students have to know what the topic sentence is, what specific supports are, and several ways of organizing their thoughts like cause and effect, time order, comparison, etc. in advance. Then, the students can concentrate on expressing their minds in a written form. Therefore, the exercise of writing a personal impression after reading a text comes later than ordinary writing exercises.

3. The Relation of Essential Elements in Natural Communication

The previous observation of natural communication reveals four essential elements: the message itself, understanding the message, judging the message with one's sense of values, and organizing one's judgement. The relationship between these four elements is shown in the following diagram.
As the diagram shows, people definitely need a message to begin communication whether it is in spoken form or written form. The circled number 1 in the diagram shows that the message isn't understood, so it flows into the air or the communication is ended with the simple sentence, "I don't know." The circled number 2 indicates that the message is examined by the message receiver's sense of values. However, the message is responded to with Yes/No and it isn't developed beyond that. If the message matches the receiver's sense of values, the message is well accepted, and a conversation confirming their agreement continues for a while. If not, it is ignored or it causes a kind of heated communication until the communicators come to understand each other. This heated communication is seen in the case of exchanging different opinions. The circled number 3 shows this phenomenon. In this case the communication continues for a long time. Using the fourth element, organizing one's mind, a person can describe the reason why he judges the message in that way, and he can express his mind sufficiently either in spoken language or in written language. This demonstrates how important it is for the message to be understood and to go through one's sense of values in order to be an important element of communication.

Japanese English teachers have been busy developing only the students' ability of understanding as comprehension ability. They haven't tried to make use of their students' sense of values yet. This is the very point that they have to realize. Communication surely involves not only knowledge of language but also knowledge of the culture.

4. Why the Exercise of Writing a Personal Impression Is Essential

In spoken communication, if two people are busy only propagating their own opinion, they won't be able to understand each other at all. Then a question arises. Why do people converse? Generally we converse in order to understand each other's situation. Therefore, the message receiver's first task is to understand the message. His second task is to judge the message with his sense of values. In spoken communication, however, time is so limited that the receiver can't judge the message with his sense of values adequately. This is a handicap to
learners of English, who feel that they have too short a time to organize their thoughts. But if the receiver has a chance to write it down, he will have enough time to stimulate his sense of values and organize his mind much more easily. If he has this kind of practice as often as possible like Mr. Otagaki says, he will be a good communicator whether in spoken form or written form.

Reading material can offer many sorts of information as messages about the world including people, culture, weather, politics, etc. Receiving the message from a book, the reader starts to activate his mind to understand the message. His sense of values is stimulated almost at the same time so he is able to experience broadening his knowledge. He will be happier if he is able to share his new knowledge about the world with others. His next work is to express his mind. He needs practice in writing a personal impression after reading. This practice is essential in developing L2 learners' communicative ability as stated in 2. (2)b.

5. Conclusion

Japanese English teachers are aware that their students are very weak at expressing their opinion. The teachers have tried to help the students speak out. One teacher helps his students make a speech in front of classmates. Another teacher asks the students to write compositions in order to express their mind. Those teachers' help is wonderful; however, they emphasize only the role of the message sender. They tend to defocus the important role of a message receiver. If people want to have desirable communication (continuous communication), they have to have a message receiver. Therefore, to understand the message is a very important element in continuous communication. Teachers have to try to give the students a chance to stimulate their sense of values as often as possible. At the same time teachers have to have students practice writing a personal impression after reading a text. This practice begins with understanding the message in the text and goes on to stimulation of sense of values, and organization of mind follows. Therefore, the practice of writing a personal impression after reading a text is really an essential role in cultivating L2 learners' communicative ability.

Notes
1. 井門義男 『日本人学生の話す英語』『JASCT 通信』大学英語教育学会，No.75, June 1990, 1.
2. The JACET Committee on Teaching Materials, Interactive Reading. 朝日出版社，1992, 70.

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