Techniques to Develop Practical Communicative Abilities

in Textbooks for Japanese Secondary School English Education

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1. Introduction

Textbooks for *eigoka kyouikuhou*, or Japanese secondary school English education, usually aim to introduce university students in teaching programs to the theories and methodologies of teaching English as a foreign language in Japanese secondary schools. They discuss how to develop good and effective lessons for junior and senior high schools. They also introduce useful teaching techniques and present model lesson plans not only for students in the teaching course but also for working teachers.

In 1998 a new guideline, *The Course of Study for Foreign Languages for Lower Secondary School*, was announced by the Ministry of Education (the present Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT]). It was implemented in 2002. A new guideline for upper secondary school was issued in 1999 and implemented in 2003. This revision of the Course of Study focuses on the development of students' practical communicative abilities and gives examples of functions of language use in devising communicative activities. MEXT (2003b) recommends teaching materials for upper secondary school students which give "sufficient consideration to actual language-use situations and functions of language." Although the new Course of Study lists functions to be taught, such as expressing gratitude, it still lists sentence patterns and grammatical items as well. In this sense, it seems to be based more upon a structural syllabus than a functional syllabus.

Subsequently, several university textbooks related to Japanese secondary school English education were published in revised editions. How have the authors of these revised editions proposed techniques to overcome this difficult challenge to enhance practical communicative abilities in a structural syllabus? Are integrated activities, such as communication activities using previously learned grammatical points, being proposed in the revised lesson plans?

This paper examines the changes in the teaching techniques recommended in these

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textbooks, given the new shift in emphasis to practical communicative abilities. It then critically reviews the changes in their proposed techniques, especially those described in model lesson plans for the English I and II courses, comparing the textbooks published before the announcement with the revised editions.

2. Practical Communicative Abilities and Grammar Instruction

The Course of Study for Foreign Languages for Upper Secondary School (2003b) gives as its overall objectives: "To develop students' practical communication abilities such as understanding information and the speaker's or writer's intentions, and expressing their own ideas, deepening the understanding of language and culture, and fostering a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages." What kind of practical communication abilities are suggested in the Course of Study?

In a commentary book for the revised Course of Study for upper secondary schools, edited by Niizato (2000:17), Ito defines students' basic practical communication abilities as the abilities to communicate with foreign people in a real situation by using a foreign language, to understand information and intentions conveyed in conversation or writing, and to communicate their own ideas and information and express themselves in a foreign language. Niizato (2000:195) remarks that carrying out communication activities is obligatory, but teaching language elements such as grammatical items is not, so teachers should teach them only when they judge the grammar is needed to develop communication activities effectively. He (2000:196) recommends that teachers build their lessons around a communication activity, and then judge which language elements are suitable to be incorporated in their practice or communication activities.

In the book for explaining the content of the Course of Study for upper secondary schools, MEXT (2003a:83) states that language elements should be taught appropriately, taking into account language activities, contexts and situations, students' specific needs and so on. The important thing is to develop language activities using language elements.

In summary, the most respected commentary books for the Course of Study assert that the core of the teaching lies in carrying out language activities for acquiring practical communicative abilities, not grammatical competence, and that a grammar syllabus is not suggested in the Course of Study.

However, some, including writers of the textbooks for *eigoka kyouikuhou,* regard

the current Course of Study as still based on a grammar syllabus.

Takahashi (2000:61) remarks that the final aim of the Course of Study is to acquire practical communication skills.   However, since the revised Course of Study indicates in which school (lower or upper) grammatical items should be taught, he points out that its authors still keep a grammar or structural syllabus in mind.   He states that it is close to Brumfit's spiral syllabus of Communicative Language Teaching, "the syllabus as a grammatical ladder with a functional-notional spiral around it" (Brumfit 1981:50).

According to Brumfit, learners can aim to develop grammatical or structural abilities in the framework of the development of communicative abilities.   He explains his model as follows:

> [A]ny attempt to contextualise or situationalise the grammatical items will involve a variety of language functions being used and a variety of notions being realised.   It will not be difficult to bargain appropriate functions or notions (if they appear to be unduly neglected or omitted altogether) against the syntactic forms being used. (Brumfit 1981 : 50)

Yamauchi (2003:128) acknowledges the focus on communication abilities and positive attitude in the revised Course of Study.   He believes, though, that its authors still intend a grammar-based approach to communication.   He says that the importance of grammar instruction in a classroom is widely recognized, but that there are several opinions as to what should be taught, and when and how.   He suggests that grammar instruction and communication teaching should be balanced (2003:133).

The present author takes the same view as Takahashi and Yamauchi.   In this author's interpretation of the revised Course of Study, it aims to develop students' basic practical communicative abilities by using communication activities and teaching functions in the framework of a structural syllabus.   In its "treatment of the contents" of English I, it recommends integrating several listening and speaking activities without excessive focus on reading and writing.   With regard to grammar instruction for English I, it suggests that "[a]nalyses and explanations of language elements should be minimized" (2003b).   It also suggests an emphasis on understanding how certain language elements, namely sentence patterns and grammatical items, are used in real-life contexts.   How do the textbooks for *eigoka kyouikuhou* propose to teach sentence patterns and grammatical items for developing practical communicative

abilities in English I? This paper examines the kinds of teaching techniques, especially those shown in model lesson plans for English I and II in the textbooks for English Education, proposed for instruction of grammar and communication skills. In this paper the definition for "technique" follows Brown (1994:137):

> Even before Anthony (1963) discussed and defined the term, the language teaching literature widely accepted technique as a superordinate term to refer to various activities that either teachers or learners perform in the classroom. In other words, techniques include all tasks and activities.

3. Tasks

According to Takashima (2005), in Japan students learn English as a foreign language and there is not enough chance to use English and interact with others in English outside the classroom. Since teachers cannot expect their students to speak English sufficiently outside the classroom, they should try to develop students' practical communicative abilities in the classroom as much as possible. Traditionally, grammar instruction and communication activities in the classroom are conducted separately. Takashima thinks that teachers should give students opportunities to select a newly learned grammar rule which is suitable for use in each concrete situation. He considers it important to let students engage in tasks in which they express themselves using newly learned grammar rules according to each situation.

Takashima (2005:3) regards "practical communicative abilities" as abilities to use English outside the classroom as a means of communication, and suggests using tasks in which learners engage in a simulation of real life for developing learners' abilities to use English outside the classroom. He believes developing practical communicative abilities will be enabled by experiencing language use through various language activities done as simulation (2005:15). He proposes *task katsudou* ("task activities"), activities which require learners to use language in a task, undertaken as a part of teaching using authorized textbooks formulated on the basis of a structural syllabus.

According to Ellis (2003:17), there are unfocused tasks[1] and focused tasks.

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[1] "A task that is designed to encourage the comprehension and production of language for purposes of communication, i.e. it is not designed to elicit attention to any specific linguistic feature." (Ellis, 2003:352)

Focused tasks are classified into two types: grammatical tasks and consciousness raising tasks[2]. Takashima's activities seem to be close to grammatical tasks, in which "teachers may want to provide learners with the opportunity to practice a specific feature under real operating condition" (Ellis 2003:17). Moreover, Takashima's approach seems to be based upon task-supported language teaching, which is "teaching that utilizes tasks to provide free practice in the use of a specific linguistic feature that has been previously presented and practiced in exercises" (Ellis 2003:351).

Which type of tasks do the writers of revised textbooks for *eigoka kyouikuhou* suggest, focused tasks, unfocused tasks, or both? Do they propose that the focus should be on linking form with meaning, and connecting form with language use in concrete situations? Do they suggest that form and meaning should be taught separately?

4. Proposed Techniques

4. 1 English I

According to Kato (2005:3-4), the 2003 English I textbooks present "a shift in teaching objectives from reading-oriented to speaking-oriented lessons" and embrace "more communicative activities, such as speaking and listening tasks, than former versions."

> Generally speaking, one chapter consists of a reading section, followed by grammar instruction and its practice, which is not so different from lessons in former textbooks, except for the inclusion of speaking exercises. The speaking sections are placed at the end of chapters or allotted as additional exercises in most of the textbooks. (Kato, 2005:4)

As Kato points out, the organization of English I textbooks[3] has not been greatly changed. Grammar explanations and exercises are still included. The difference is the speaking section placed at the end of each chapter. She says the most obvious

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[2] "A task that engages learners in thinking and communicating about language. Thus, a language point becomes the topic that is talked about." (Ellis, 2003:341)

[3] Kato (2005) examined five English I textbooks published in 2003 including *Crown English I* (Shimozaki. et al.).

feature in the 2003 revised English I textbooks is the use of colored visuals and images. Since the content of English I high school textbooks has not changed so dramatically, are there any changes in the techniques proposed by *eigoka kyouikuhou* textbooks?

Fujimori (2005:15) believes that "English I is more traditional in its approach, with longer reading passages and comprehension questions," compared to the targeting of improving listening and speaking skills in Oral Communication I. He (2005:15) remarks that the revised Course of Study "focuses on developing the ability to use English, while de-emphasizing grammar and translation and teacher-oriented classes." Do sample lesson plans for English I and II proposed in college textbooks for English education also de-emphasize grammar and translation? What kind of shift can be seen in them?

With regard to teaching methods for English I, Kizuka proposes the following procedure: warm-up, review, presentation of the new material, practice, reading, and consolidation (Imura et al. 2001:136-9). The following table summarizes techniques proposed in 2001 edition:

Table 1   Techniques in Kizuka's Lesson Plans

Warm-up	Greetings
	Questions and answers in English
	Short speech
Review	Listening to a tape of the previously learned passage
	True or false
	Pattern practice
	Dictation
Presentation of the new material	Oral introduction or oral interaction with pictures, etc.
	Grammar explanations
Practice	Pattern practice for target grammar
	Oral work in pairs using target grammar
	Interview game
	Role play
Reading	Pronunciation practice for new words
	Partial translation
	True or false
	Questions and answers
Consolidation	Drill for target grammar

The warming-up is a new suggestion in the 2001 edition, being absent from the lesson plans in the 1993 edition. Examining the techniques proposed in the two lesson plans in the 1993 edition, the short speech, pattern practice for target grammar, oral work in pairs using target grammar, interview game, and role play are newly added in the 2001 edition.

4. 2 Proposed Techniques Shown in English I and II

4. 2. 1 Comparison of Proposed Techniques

What techniques are actually recommended by the university textbooks for Japanese secondary school English education? The table below details the proposed techniques in their methodologies and lesson plans for English I and II. The following fourteen textbooks are examined:

	Year	Textbooks published in the 1990s.
A	1990	Takahashi, *Eigo Kyouikugaku Gairon* (Kinseido) pp. 179-85.
B	1993	Imura et al., *Eigoka Kyouikuhou Nyumon [Kaiteiban]* (Gakubunsha) pp. 128-31.
C	1993	Shiozawa et al., *Shin Eigoka Kyouiku no Tenkai* (Eichosha) pp. 109-17.
D	1996	Hatanaka et al., *Saishin Eigoka Kyouikuhou* (Seibido) pp.76-96.
E	1996	Aoki (ed.), *Eigoka Kyouiku no Riron to Jissen* (Gendaikyouikusha) pp. 109-10.
F	1996	Yoneyama et al., *Eigoka Kyouikuhou Handbook* (Taishukan Publishing) pp. 88-93.
G	1998	JACET Research Committee for Educational Problems, *Eigoka Kyouiku no Kiso to Jissen* (Sanshusha) pp. 181-92.

	Year	The same textbooks in their revised editions of the 2000s.
a	2000	Takahashi et al., *Eigo Kyouikugaku Gairon [Kaiteishinhan]* (Kinseido) pp. 74-83, 96-9, 114-5.
b	2001	Imura et al., *Atarashii Eigoka Kyouikuhou* (Gakubunsha) pp. 131-2, 136-40.
c	2004	Shiozawa et al., *Shin Eigoka Kyouiku no Tenkai (Shinteiban)* (Eichosha), pp. 131-42.

d	2001	Muranoi et at., *Jissenteki Eigoka Kyouikuhou* (Seibido) pp. 98-102, 104-6. (This is not the revised version of D [*Saishin Eigoka Kyouikuhou*], but Hatanaka, H. contributed to both texts, and the style is broadly similar.)
e	2002	Aoki (ed.), *Atarashii Eigoka Kyouikuhou* (Gendaikyouikusha) pp. 216-8.
f	2002	Yoneyama et al., [*Kaiteiban*] *Eigoka Kyouikuhou Handbook* (Taishukan Publishing) pp. 88-93.
g	2005	JACET Research Committee for Educational Problems, *Shin Eigoka Kyouiku no Kiso to Jissen* (Sanshusha) pp. 175-86.

Techniques No.1 through No.18 are chosen from the 38 techniques listed by Brown in "Taxonomy of Language Teaching Techniques (adapted from Crookes & Chaudron)" (1994:142-3). The rest are selected by the author. The given letters from A through G and a through g designate the textbooks using the technique in question.

Table 2   Proposed Techniques

Techniques	Textbooks in the 1990s	Textbooks in the 2000s
1. Warm-up	A, C, E, F	a, b, c, e, f, g
2. Setting[i]	A, C, F, G	a, b, c, d, e, f, g
3. Organizational[ii]	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, e, f, g
4. Content Explanation[iii]	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, e, f, g
5. Reading aloud	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, f, g
6. Drill	A, C, D,G	a, b, e, g
7. Dictation	G	b, d, e, g
8. Review	A, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, f, g
9. Meaningful drill[iv]		a
10. Story-telling		d
11. Cued narrative/Dialog[v]	F	f
12. Information transfer[vi]		d
13. Role-play		b
14. Games	E	a, b
15. Drama	C, E	
16. Interview	E	a, b
17. Discussion		d
18. Composition	A, B, D, F	e, f, g

19. Casual conversation	A, C	b, c, d, e, g
20. Pronunciation of new words	A, B, C, F, G	a, b, c, f, g
21. Listening to the tape	A, B, C, D, F, G	a, b, c, e, f, g
22. Oral introduction	A, B, C, D, E, G	a, b, c, g
23. Oral interaction	C, E	b, c, d, e
24. Question-answering	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, e, f, g
25. Presentation of new language material	A, C, D, E, G	a, b, c, e, g
26. Grammar explanation	A, B, C, D, F, G	a, b, c, e, f, g
27. Speech or short speech	C, E	b, c
28. Pattern practice	A	a, b
29. Reading comprehension	A, B, C, D, E, F, G	a, b, c, d, e, f, g
30. Partial translation (English-Japanese)	C, D, F, G	b, c, e, f, g
31. Shadowing		e
32. Chorus reading	A, C, D, F, G	a, b, f, g
33. Silent reading	A, C, D, E, G	a, d, g
34. Individual buzz reading	G	g
35. Read and look-up	D, F	f
36. Unfocused task		
37. Focused task — grammatical tasks	A, C	a, b, c, g
37. Focused task — consciousness raising tasks		

Notes

i.   Setting: "Focusing in on lesson topic." (Brown1994:143)

ii. Organizational: Managerial structuring of lesson or class activities.   Includes Disciplinary action, organization of class furniture and seating, general procedures for class interaction, and performance, structure and purpose of lesson, etc." (1994:143)

iii. Content explanation: "Explanation of lesson content: grammatical, phonological, lexical (vocabulary), sociolinguistic, pragmatic, or any other aspects of language." (1994:143)

iv. Meaningful drill: "Drill activity involving responses with meaningful choices, as in reference to different information." (1994:143)
"Story telling" here is specifically generated by students.

v.   Cued narrative/Dialog: "Student production of narrative or dialog following cues from miming, cue cards, pictures, or other stimuli related to narrative/dialog." (1994:144)

vi. Information transfer: "Application from one mode (e.g., visual) to another (e.g., writing), which involves some transformation of the information." (1994:144)

4. 2. 2   Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 2, *warm-up* tends to be adopted more in the editions from the 2000s.   Warm-up seems to give opportunities to become familiar with English at the start of the lesson and to speak English in casual conversation with real-life topics. Takahashi (2000:72) uses songs, which attract many students' interest and aid in teaching English rhythm.   For example, he develops "Let's Bingo!," in which students play a bingo game while listening to Eric Clapton's song "Change the World."   He says that teachers can use this song for an activity comparing subjunctive if-clauses with conditional if-clauses.   Takahashi suggests that teachers develop other learning activities analogous to this one.

Setting has become more popular too, with more of the recent editions tending to focus on lesson topics by way of questioning, oral interaction or picture presentation than those from the 1900s.   Shiozawa (2004b:132) says that in introduction of new material the use of Japanese in a classroom should be kept to a minimum, using real objects, pictures and photographs.   He then proposes that teachers to motivate students' interest by using background knowledge in an oral introduction or oral interaction section.

The authors of the newly revised editions believe that dictation is useful for developing both listening and writing skills.   Hatanaka (2001:105-6) additionally believes that it can be used to develop speaking skills as well.   He develops dictation into *oral expression*, so that students can express themselves with the information they have written down in dictation.

More textbooks now tend to set time for casual conversation.   It is often recommended for use in the warm-up phase, with teachers directing about five minutes' talk around questions such as, "How did you spend last weekend?" in order to make the students more comfortable with the English lessons (cf. JACET Research Committee 2005:175).

Composition is less popular in the editions from the 2000s.   It is possible that the previously popular translation of Japanese sentences into English has been shifted to different activities such as dictation tasks in which students can develop both listening and writing skills.

The following techniques and activities remain popular: organizational, setting, reading aloud, drill, review, pronunciation of new words, listening to the tape, oral interaction, question-answering, presentation of new language material, grammar

explanation, and partial translation of English sentences into Japanese.

In designing the English I and II classes, MEXT (2003b) recommended fostering oral communication abilities in order to build on the emphasis they receive in lower secondary schools. As seen in Table 2, however, techniques and activities which give the chance of developing oral communication abilities such as games and unfocused tasks are not sufficiently used in either the older editions or the current ones. The revised editions do propose focused grammatical tasks.

5. Conclusion

Kizuka (2001:136) says that teachers in the English I course tend to explain sentence patterns and grammar points as well as pronunciation and vocabulary. He (2001:131) says that English I and English II are generally treated as reading comprehension or interpretation courses and that in many upper secondary schools the Translation Method is being followed. Students tend to read aloud from a given passage and translate it into Japanese even though the revised Course of Study recommends the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be incorporated harmoniously. However, university textbooks from the 2000s tend to include more communicative techniques and activities. Where those from the 1900s propose composition, those from the 2000s recommend dictation in which students can listen and write down what they hear, and sometimes may have a chance to express what they have just heard in front of the class. In dictation they have a chance to develop the three skills of listening, writing and speaking, but in composition they usually develop only one skill: writing.

As Table 2 shows, university textbook writers for Japanese secondary school English education still recommend techniques such as reading comprehension and grammar translation over those of developing speaking skills.

In situations based on a reading-structure oriented syllabus, some of the revised editions recommend several techniques in order to develop listening and speaking skills as well as reading: games, interviews, and casual conversation.

Most of the drills and activities introduced in model lesson plans in these textbooks are devised to help students acquire target grammar. There are challenging proposals to integrate grammar and speaking, such as Takahashi's use of songs to compare grammatical points, and the connection of oral expression to dictation by Hatanaka.

As well as *oral introduction*, textbooks from the 2000s tend to recommend *oral interaction*, probably because it allows students to interact and speak. As Sato (1995:38) points out, oral introduction in its strict sense has not been actually carried out except in the introductory stages in lower secondary schools and other special causes. One of the shortcomings of oral introduction is that teachers make efforts to present the material, students just listen to it without response. The author believes that rather than oral introduction, to develop speaking skills, oral interaction creating students' independent speech should be encouraged. Likewise, some of the textbook writers propose oral interaction developing interaction between teacher and students.

Imura (2001:7) believes that *eigoka kyouikuhou* is a practical subject and that the primary purpose is to teach students methods and techniques so as not to be perplexed in practice teaching. Shiozawa et al. (2004:iii) similarly remark that their book is written as a guide to teaching methods for English Education in Japanese secondary schools to let the readers learn essential knowledge as a professional teacher, hoping that their book will be helpful when the students go to practice teaching. Shiozawa (2004a:3) states that the Course of Study is a general guideline, and so its objectives are general ones: each teacher should understand the guideline and develop his or her own objectives for the lessons, considering the students' situations, ability levels, the school's education policies, and the current needs produced by society. With the same view as Imura and Shiozawa, the author hopes that textbook writers for *eigoka kyouikuhou* propose more techniques which integrate the development of practical communicative abilities and grammatical competence, so that each teacher can adopt techniques from various selections in order to realize his or her own original lessons for developing communication.

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