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From the Editor

Welcome to the very first issue of Saitama Journal of Language Teaching. Three JALT Omiya Chapter members share results of their thinking, their research, or their experiences with you. **Fuyuhiko Sekido** introduces you to three practical activities for the language classroom which you can easily use with students of different levels. **Masa Tsuneyasu** discusses the differences between Japanese and English written rhetorical organization and gives you ideas how to teach Japanese students to write more effectively. **Leander Hughes** constructs a framework with which you can assess the communicative potential of language learning activities.

I hope that you will find SJLT of practical use in your classroom, or of theoretical interest in your research. However, SJLT has another goal: For all of us involved in this new journal, be it as authors, reviewers, or editors, SJLT is an opportunity to develop professional, personal, or social skills. Writing, reviewing, giving feedback to authors, receiving constructive criticism from reviewers and dealing with it, editing, mentoring authors at early stages of their teaching or research career, networking – all these activities give us a chance to learn by doing and to develop ourselves and each other. I believe that in the months leading up to this first issue, we experienced all of the above. With SJLT, we hope to create a stronger sense of community at JALT Omiya Chapter and to stimulate good communication and lively interaction between members.

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Techniques & Activities

Three Practical Activities for English Classrooms

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In this paper I will introduce three practical activities for English classrooms which can be conducted in a few minutes. I am a part-time university English lecturer, and I tried these activities in my classes last semester. They were well received. The three activities are “Effective reading aloud”, “Guess what?”, and “Who are some world famous Japanese?” The goal of these activities is to increase interest in English. My students are all freshmen, are categorized as a middle-level class and are motivated to learn English. The activities could be used for classes of any level.

Effective reading aloud (about 10 minutes)

In some classes teachers say, “Let’s read the textbook aloud!” However, there is often little enthusiasm. To avoid this kind of situation, instructors need a structure that allows students to read aloud.

1. Have learners stand up.
2. Have them read the passage twice. If a CD is available for the textbook, have them practice reading aloud (chorus reading) with the CD prior to this stage. The first time, have them stand and read aloud as fast as they can. When they finish, have them sit down and read aloud one more time.
3. After this reading, have them make pairs, and do Rock, Scissors, Paper (*janken*).

4. Confirm who the winners are. Then say that the *janken* winners will be listeners and the losers will be readers. Have the losers read the same passage again in 30 seconds. After 30 seconds, have them change roles. This time the winners will read the passages.
5. Next, have the pair read the sentences alternately. When they come to the end of a sentence, they change roles. The time limit is again 30 seconds.

Why are learners asked to stand up and read twice? One reason is to keep them alert. This is vital because some students feel sleepy after lunch or gym class, but in this activity everyone has to stand and so no one can doze off during the activity. The second reason is to prevent learners from looking around. Having them do it only once, some learners may look around, and wonder how others are doing. This can be an embarrassing situation for the last person. To avoid this kind of situation, I have them read twice. The last reason is to count the average time because a slightly shorter time than average is an achievable goal and can motivate learners. Though I gave 30 seconds as an example, it can be lengthened or shortened.

After this effective reading aloud activity, the class atmosphere will dramatically change. Learners will be cheerful, and a new activity can be smoothly introduced.

Guess what? *(about 10 minutes)*

Next, I will introduce a vocabulary activity, “Guess what?” This is a simple word quiz.

1. Have learners make pairs, and do *janken*.
2. Have the *janken* winners face the rear of the classroom. The losers face the teacher who shows an English word, which they explain to their partner. In some cases students can use gestures to describe words.

3. After giving students 20 or 30 seconds to guess, tell them the answer.
4. Show or tell them the definition of this word. The definitions are taken from an English-English dictionary.
5. Have them change roles and continue using different words.

Any words can be chosen for this activity, but some key words chosen from the next activity would be especially effective.

Who are some world famous Japanese? *(about 10 – 40 minutes)*

The last activity is “Who are some world famous Japanese?” The aim of this activity is to think about Japan or Japanese in English.

1. Ask learners the question, “Who are some world famous Japanese?” and write down their answers on the blackboard.
2. Show learners the TV program “*Eigo de Shabera-night*”. In this program some foreigners or native English speakers were asked the question, “Who are some world famous Japanese?” in New York, London and Paris. Among their answers were Ichiro, Matsui, Koizumi, Nakata, Godzilla, and Hello Kitty.
3. Do the activity “Guess what?” which I described above in this paper and give students hints for the person you will introduce for that day’s lesson. For example, one day I chose “game” and “creator”.
4. Make them guess the person associated with “game” and “creator”, and introduce the person, Shigeru Miyamoto, who worked for Nintendo and created Super Mario. This year he was chosen as one of the most influential 100 people in the world in TIME magazine. He is also introduced on several websites.
5. Give learners some articles about him. After reading them, have them make summaries in English within 20 minutes.

Some of these ideas were stimulated by the magazine CNN English Express (April

2007) published by Asahi Press. This issue focuses on introducing world famous Japanese and, fortunately, includes not only a CD and transcripts, but also a DVD. On the DVD some famous Japanese actually speak in English. The following are some of the persons introduced in the magazine: Hidetoshi Nakata, Ayumi Hamasaki and Sadako Ogata. In addition, several articles about them in newspapers or other English magazines are included. Therefore I could do this activity several times. In other words, I could introduce a famous Japanese person every week.

In my university class I did all the activities mentioned above, but step 5 can be omitted if there isn't enough time or if it is too difficult. I think introducing some world famous Japanese is interesting because the famous Japanese speak and actually use English. These scenes will stimulate learners in their studies and their interest in English.

Conclusion

My students really enjoyed these activities. The activities do not take too much time, so they can be used as a warm-up, a break or for future activities. Introducing them in your lesson will brighten the atmosphere of your class.

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Research & Theory

The Effective Writing Class: The Importance of Input and Output

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Keywords: rhetorical organization, L1-L2 transfer, extensive reading

Advanced Japanese students have a good command of English grammar. However, they still have difficulty applying their ability in writing contexts and have problems organizing papers cohesively. This paper briefly summarizes the major differences between the written rhetoric of Japanese and English. Based upon the findings of writing experiments, the paper then elaborates on the propensity of Japanese students to make certain kinds of errors in writing English papers. Finally, the writer discusses some effective ways to teach Japanese students how to write better papers in English.

Academic papers written by Japanese students often have a good grasp of grammatical conventions, but nevertheless read as a hodge-podge of incoherent and unconventional styles. According to Kubota (1992), foreign language learners are likely to carry over their native language styles when they produce papers in foreign languages. This is called "L1-L2 transfer" (Kubota, 1992). The author of this paper remembers her own past experience of writing English papers with Japanese rhetorical organization. Most native English speakers become confused when they read such papers: The papers might lack consistency in each paragraph, take several surprising turns in the main part, and give new information in the conclusion. The Japanese rhetorical organization is called *Ki-Shoo-Ten-Ketsu* (起承転結). Adding to the problem of L1-L2 transfer, Japanese students are usually not familiar with English rhetoric. To make the matter even worse, they do not have sufficient input regarding various kinds of English organizations and output—writing practice—at school. These reasons lead many Japanese students to have problems organizing papers that are well integrated and cohesive.

Rhetorical Differences between Japanese and English

According to Kaplan (1983), Japanese texts are inductive, whereas English texts are based upon a deductive pattern. Kaplan also notes that Japanese writers are more likely to express their sentences subjectively, which might lead to ambiguities and the reader's need to guess what the writer intends to say. Inductive and subjective: This is rooted in the Japanese conventional writing style, *Ki-Shoo-Ten-Ketsu*. Kitao (1988) explains that this organization is referred to as the model rhetorical structure of expository and other writings. Kitao explains further that the structure is: *Ki*) topic presentation, *Shoo*) topic development, *Ten*) surprising turn, and *Ketsu*) conclusion. One example of this organization is:

> *Ki*: English is a global language.
> *Shoo*: Therefore, the Japanese study English hard.
> *Ten*: The older generation cannot read English.
> *Ketsu*: If the Japanese master English, they will have more opportunity in the future.

For people who are used to the English writing style, two things can be confusing in this convention. First, most Japanese readers expect to have surprising turns or irrelevant information in the *Ten* part. This is supposed to give spice to the text and

to keep it from becoming monotonous. Second, in the *Ketsu* part, writers usually introduce a new topic which does not summarize the entire paper at all the way an English conclusion would.

In English papers, by contrast, the careful sequencing of information is critical. Papers in English ordinarily must have an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion with a summary. Kitao (1988) also observes that, in order to assure effective comprehension, writers need to tell their ideas to the readers three times. This general rule reflects the requirement of an introduction, a main body, and a summary as the desired, standard, English rhetorical organization.

Method

Participants

The participants in the experiment were Japanese freshmen majoring in English at a university in Japan who had been studying English for about six years. These participants were organized into two different classes and class periods. Class I (in the first period) consisted of 34 students, while class II (in the second period) had 33 students (in total, N=67). Students in both classes (I and II) took English writing composition. Female students made up 65 percent of the participants. With respect to their English proficiency, previous test results confirmed that they excelled in receptive skills (listening and reading), but performed poorly with regard to productive skills (speaking and writing). The average scores of an April 2006 TOEIC test for the two classes were similar (about 550). Most of the students qualified as Step Eiken pre-2nd grade.

Procedure

This experiment was conducted in the spring term of 2006, and it had three stages. The students in both classes 1) were asked to write a preliminary essay in April, 2) then took a writing course from April to July, and 3) wrote a final, comparative essay in late July. One significant difference between class I and II was that only students belonging to class I were taught reading strategies. This study, consequently, aimed to determine whether or not teaching reading strategies could effectively help students improve their writing. To do this, the final comparative essays from class I (students with reading strategies) were compared with those of class II (students without).

Pre-testing

In this stage, the subjects were asked to write an essay introducing themselves to the instructor within 30 minutes without any aid. One important instruction for the students was that the essay had to have at least 5 paragraphs. The instructor also emphasized that overall organization was more important than grammar, sentence structure, and the use of vocabulary.

Writing course

The students in class I and II took a writing course from April until early July 2006. They met once a week and each class lasted 90 minutes. At the beginning, students reviewed essential keys to writing English essays and familiarized themselves with the grading criteria outlined in appendix A. In the third week, students learned how to brainstorm using various diagrams (see appendix B). The precept underlying this training is the importance of graphic organizers which help students outline entire papers (Byrne, 1999).

In the seventh week, students learned English discourse. The students in both class I and II practiced rearranging the sentences of model paragraphs and putting the sentences into an order that made sense. Afterwards, the original paragraphs were shown and students discussed their arrangement as compared to their own. To consolidate what they learned, students wrote one essay per class as a homework assignment. Most writing prompts were excerpted from materials available in

TOEFL. Additionally, students spent several hours analyzing their own papers.

Teaching reading strategies (Class I only)

Throughout the class, apart from writing exercises, students in class I (N=34) also learned reading strategies. These included the following skills: 1) skimming, 2) scanning, 3) previewing and predicting context, 4) building vocabulary, and 5) understanding various organizations. Organizations included listing, explanation, time order, comparison, opinion, and finally, cause and effect. In each class, students did exercises to consolidate these strategies as well as timed reading to improve their reading strategies. For reinforcement, they read passages and did comprehension checks as homework assignments.

Post-testing

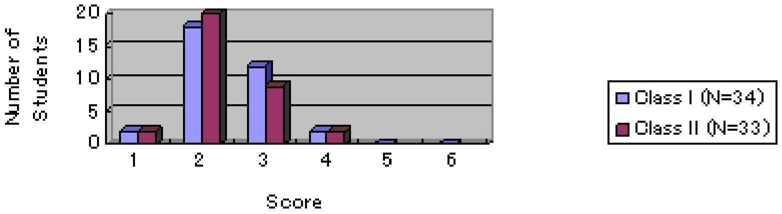
In late July, class I and class II were required to write a final essay. The prompt was: “Tell Me about Your Summer Vacation.”

Results

Students’ papers were graded using the TOEFL scoring guide for tests of English composition. To insure reliability in the application of these scoring standards, two raters, who were linguistic graduate students, read each paper at least twice. Additionally, the papers being graded did not bear the students’ names and classes. This safeguard not only preserved objectivity during the review process, but also neutralized any element of researcher expectancy (Brown, 1988).

In the first writing results taken in April 2006, a propensity of Japanese students to make certain kinds of errors in writing English papers was observed. First, the three essential parts (introductory, main body, and summary section) did not exist in their essays. Most adhered to the Japanese convention style *Ki-Shoo-Ten-Ketsu*. Also, the arguments were neither consistent nor focused. Third, there were few supporting ideas and pertinent examples, and there were new topics in the summary part. Additionally, the students did not reiterate their thesis statements, which made the entire papers difficult to follow. Both classes had similar scores as shown below.

Figure 1: The results of the first writing test



As shown in Figure 1 above, the majority of participants in both class I and II received a score of two because their papers were disorganized. Four students, in total, scored one as their papers contained no more than six sentences. In contrast, four students who had lived in English-speaking countries and another two who had writing experience in English peaked at four. Their papers were structured with English rhetoric.

Figure 2: The results of the second writing test for Class I

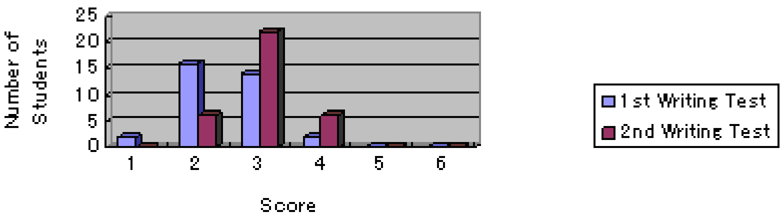
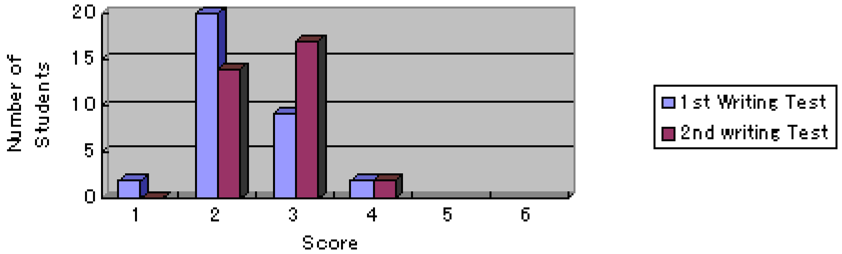


Figure 3: The result of the second writing test for Class II.



As shown in figures 2 and 3 above, both classes clearly improved after taking the intensive writing course. The test outcomes suggest obvious improvements on at least three fronts. First, the test results reveal an increased ability on the part of the students to better marshal and "budget" their efforts in view of the time allotted for the exercise. Second, the test results indicate an improvement in composition skills; the organization of essays gained clarity, since papers tended to be divided into introductions, main body of argument, and summary of points made. There was no new information in the conclusion part. Third, the test scores show an increase in the power of rhetoric or persuasion, since the students were able to link pragmatic examples and illustrations with the theme of their argument.

More significantly, many students in class I, who were taught basic reading strategies, wrote better essays which were not only organized well, but also written logically. Supporting ideas were explicitly elaborated and there were plenty of consistent examples. The thesis statements and topic sentences were appropriately placed and the paragraphs were well-organized. 24 students out of 34 in class I and 16 students out of 33 in class II wrote better essays. The following numbers also prove that reading practice and strategies had a great influence on the students' achievements.

(Class I students who improved) / (Number of students in Class I) =Average for Class I

(Class II students who improved) / (Number of students in Class II) =Average for Class II

Thus:

24/34=70.59

16/33=48.48

$$\left(\begin{array}{c}\text{Average of}\\ \text{Class I students}\\ \text{who improved}\end{array}\right) - \left(\begin{array}{c}\text{Average of}\\ \text{Class II student}\\ \text{who improved}\end{array}\right) = \left(\begin{array}{c}\text{Difference in}\\ \text{improvement}\\ \text{between Class I \& II}\end{array}\right)$$

Thus:

70.59-48.48=22.11

22 percent of the students in Class I improved their writing compared to the students in Class II.

Discussion

The experiment reveals the typical differences between English and Japanese writing as well as the occurrence of L1-L2 transfer. It also demonstrates that teaching reading strategies has a positive effect on learners' writing. In the students' first essay, prior to intensive coursework in the art of English composition, they were influenced by inductive Japanese writing conventions. For example, students meandered gradually and indirectly towards a topic or conclusion in their essays. Moreover, the lack of clarity and objective writing styles created huge problems because the central ideas were vague or only loosely connected with topics in their essays.

When students in both classes I and II studied and learned effective writing methods and gained more than a rudimentary knowledge of English rhetoric and practices, their writing competency greatly improved. Also, along with writing strategies, reading practice played an important role in improving students' writing.

This study found that the following six simple suggestions will help students not only to avoid the negative effects of L1 transfer but also to write better: 1) be aware in advance of the scoring criteria, 2) get feedback on your writing, 3) practice writing with various organizations, 4) do meaningful (but not surplus) editing of your own papers and of other students' papers, 5) learn reading strategies, and finally 6) do extensive reading.

Conclusion

Lacking knowledge of English rhetorical organization, and lacking sufficient practice in writing English papers, Japanese students tend to write English papers structured with *Ki-Shoo-Ten-Ketsu*. This study investigated the reasons for the low writing proficiency of Japanese students by showing evidence of the language transfer phenomenon. The study also showed that reading strategies help students write better English papers. Finally, some methods for developing effective writing skills were suggested.

The demand for improvement in English composition has continued to grow. The author of this paper will continue to make writing classes more effective by introducing Japanese students to the English writing style, and by providing writing practice for them as well as extensive reading practice.

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Appendix A: TOEFL scoring key

1. Strongly indicates the inability to write an acceptable essay. No apparent development or organization.

2. Indicates the inability to write an acceptable essay. Organization and development are very weak or nonexistent. Lacks unity and cohesion. Few if any specific details may be given in support of the writer's ideas. If details are given, they may seem inappropriate.

3. Indicates some minimal ability in writing an acceptable essay, but involves serious weaknesses in organization and development.

4. Indicates a moderate ability to write an acceptable essay. Although main ideas may be adequately supported, weaknesses in organization and development will be apparent.

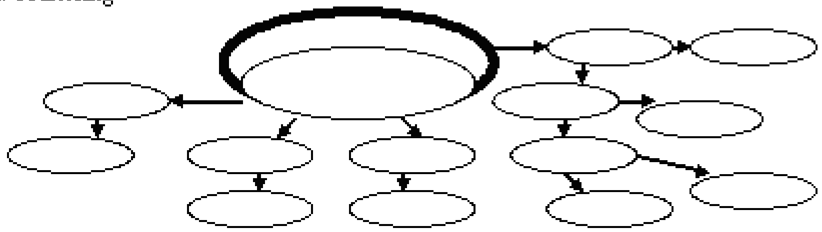
5. Indicates the ability to write an organized, developed, and logical essay. The main ideas are adequately supported by examples and details.

6. Strongly indicates the ability to write a well-organized, well-developed, and logical essay. Specific examples and details support the main ideas. All the elements of the essay are unified and cohesive.

Source: Complete Guide to the TOEFL Test (p.388)

Appendix B: Pre-writing

I. Clustering



II. Listing

Topic 1.
2. 3.
4. 5.

III. Outlining

Title: ______________________________

I. ______________________________

A. ______________________________

- ______________________________
- ______________________________
- ______________________________

B. ______________________________

- ______________________________
- ______________________________
- ______________________________

II. ______________________________

A. ______________________________

- ______________________________
- ______________________________
- ______________________________

B. ______________________________

- ______________________________
- ______________________________
- ______________________________

Source: Sakamoto, M. & Furuya, N. (2001). *Thoughts into writing*. Tokyo, Japan: Seibido (pp.3-6).

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A Framework for Assessing the Communicative Potential of Language Learning Activities

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Keywords: communicative language teaching, activity analysis

While the language teaching community in Japan pays much lip service to communicative language teaching and its offshoots, more traditional teaching approaches focusing on drills and grammar translation are still the norm in many language classrooms. One of the reasons for this may be that many teachers do not have a clear idea of what "communicative" really means. To address this problem, this article attempts to construct a concise framework with which teachers may judge whether or not an activity is potentially communicative as well as assess the relative communicative merits of one activity when compared to another.

Communicative or just confused?

Since the general rejection of the drill-oriented audiolingual and situational methods in the late 1960's, communicative approaches to language teaching including communicative language teaching, cooperative language learning, task-based language teaching, and content-based instruction have, at least in theory, come to dominate the field (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The reason I had to add "at least in theory" to the previous statement is that, while few teachers today would publicly support non-communicative approaches such as the audiolingual method or the grammar translation method, such approaches are still alive and well in many of the language classes I have observed in Japan, even in classes in which

instructors claimed to be teaching communicatively. (For strong arguments and evidence supporting communicative approaches to language teaching, see Widdowson, 1978, & Krashen, 1985.)

One reason why a great many teachers in Japan have not taken communicative approaches to language teaching, even while publicly supporting such approaches, may be that those teachers have not been given a clear idea of what is communicative and what is not. This article therefore seeks to build a concise framework for teachers to assess whether or not and to what degree an activity they wish to implement may be called communicative. Although this endeavor falls short of providing a full picture of what it means to teach communicatively, it does offer teachers a starting point from which they may develop for themselves a better understanding of what "communicative" really means.

What is communicative and what is not

To begin constructing a framework for assessing the communicative potential of an activity, it is first necessary to define "communicative". It makes sense to define communicative as that which engenders communication. But what is communication? Canale provides a helpful preliminary definition of communication as "the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral and written/visual modes, and production and comprehension processes" (1983, p. 4).

We may break this definition into at least four basic premises with regard to the nature of communication. First, communication requires two or more participants. Second, all participants must both send information to and receive information from each other participant. Third, the information received must be received through comprehending it in the target language, while the information sent must be sent through being comprehended and then produced in the target language by the sender (Canale, 1983).

Thus, for example, the process of encoding information from the L1 into the target language and then decoding it from the target language back into the L1, although not entirely without merit, cannot be considered true target language communication.

The above three premises lead to the first four questions to be used in our framework for assessing the communicative potential of language learning activities:

1. Does the activity involve two or more participants?
2. Do all of the participants both send information to and receive information from each other in the target language?
3. When participants receive information, do they have to comprehend that information in the target language in order to successfully complete the activity?
4. When participants send information, do they have to comprehend and produce that information in the target language in order to successfully complete the activity?

If all questions are answered "yes" with regard to a given activity, then that activity meets the basic minimal requirements for engendering target language communication and thus may tentatively be called "communicative". If any of the questions is answered "no" with regard to an activity, then that activity does not engender true target language communication and therefore, according to the framework thus far established, cannot be called communicative.

So far, the framework laid out provides a preliminary idea of what is communicative and what is not, but it does not yet help us to judge the value of one communicative activity when compared to another. The following three sections therefore attempt to answer the question of what makes one activity potentially

more or less communicative than another.

Encouraging direct comprehension and production

The reader may have noticed that, whereas the first two questions in the previous section are relatively objective, the third and fourth are rather difficult to answer with any degree of certainty. After all, we teachers may tell learners that they must comprehend what they are saying, writing, or signing to each other in the target language in order to successfully complete an activity, but how do we know that this is what they are really doing in their minds? Though learners may sound or look like they are communicating in the target language, perhaps they are simply regurgitating the patterns of the language without actually understanding what it is they are saying. Alternatively, they may be sending and receiving information, not through directly comprehending and producing it in the target language, but rather through translating their L1 in and out of the target language.

Although we can never affirmatively answer questions three and four with one hundred percent certainty about a given activity, we can design our activities in ways that promote real target language communication by making those activities harder for learners to complete without directly comprehending and producing information in the target language. There are two major ways of doing this. First, in order to prevent learners from simply parroting or copying the target language without knowing what it is they are actually saying, one may design an activity such that it leads to a certain observable outcome that is difficult to achieve if the meaning of the target language information exchanged is not comprehended by both participants. Information gap activities in which, for example, participant A must draw a picture of an object that only participant B can see based only on B's description of that object, are one example of a type of activity which has an outcome that is difficult to achieve without participants comprehending the language they are using (see Willis, 1996, p. 24, for more on building in outcomes that encourage comprehension).

An effective strategy for countering the possibility of learners encoding the L1 into the target language and then decoding it back into the L1 during an activity is to set a time limit within which learners must complete that activity and make learners aware of that time limit. As a speaker of Japanese as a second language, I am well aware that translation, especially when done completely in one's head, is time-consuming business. Letting learners know that their time is limited will help deter them from attempting to mentally translate what they are saying and hearing into and out of their L1 and instead encourage them to use the target language they have already acquired (no matter how imperfect) to negotiate the activity.

To conclude this section, we may add the following two auxiliary questions to our framework:

5. Does the activity have an observable outcome or outcomes that are difficult to achieve without all participants using and comprehending the target language?
6. Does the activity have a suitable time limit and will students be made aware of that time limit?

Answering "no" to either of these two questions with regard to a given activity, does not make that activity non-communicative, but I propose that activities which fulfill both of the conditions indicated by these questions have a higher communicative potential than those which fulfill only one (which in turn have a higher communicative potential than those that do not fulfill either).

Estimating the quantity of information to be exchanged

In order to further assess the communicative potential of a language activity, it is important to examine the quantity of information likely to be exchanged in the

target language during that activity. To do this, we must estimate how many items of information or "messages" each participant will have to exchange to successfully complete a given activity. To understand how we might go about making such an estimate, let us consider a simple activity in which the goal is for students to find out and write down the favorite English movie, book, or TV show of three of their peers and to answer their peers' questions with regard to their own favorite English movie, book, or TV show (let us assume for simplicity's sake that all of the students really do have favorites with regard to each of these categories).

To best estimate the minimal number of target language messages that must be exchanged for successful completion of this activity, let us imagine how participants could make themselves understood and achieve the goals of the activity using as little of the target language as possible (without recourse to the L1). Such a participant (henceforth participant A) could easily initiate communication with a peer (participant B) using only non-verbal signals (eye contact, gestures, etc.). Likewise B could accept A's gambit using only non-verbal signals (e.g. by walking over to A). This leaves four basic operations that require target language use to successfully complete interaction with B: A must make a request indicating which of B's favorites he or she would like to know, B must answer A's request, and these two operations must be repeated with the roles reversed. Once A records the information gathered, he or she must repeat the above process with two more peers.

Thus, a minimum total of twelve messages must be exchanged using the target language to successfully complete the above activity. Of course, the actual number of messages students exchange while doing the activity is likely to be higher (especially if breakdowns in communication occur along the way) but estimating the minimum amount of target language messages needed to complete an activity gives us a basic idea of the quantity of target language communication an activity is likely to engender. In principle, the higher this quantity is for a communicative activity, the more communication it will likely engender.

We may therefore add a seventh question to our framework:

7. What is the estimated minimum number of messages that must be exchanged using the target language to successfully complete the activity?

Like questions 5 and 6, this is an auxiliary question meant to investigate the communicative potential of activities that have already met the basic conditions laid out in questions 1 through 4 and thus have already been shown to be tentatively communicative. The higher the number, the higher the activity's communicative potential. (Note, however, that an answer of less than two for this question would imply that the activity does not fulfill the condition laid out by question 2 that all participants must both send and receive information.)

Assessing the quality of the information to be exchanged

Beyond the quantity of the messages likely to be exchanged in an activity is the quality of the information likely to be conveyed. To understand what I mean by "quality" and why it is important in determining the communicative potential of an activity, let me first remind the reader of one of the essential conditions for an activity to be considered communicative, namely, that learners must receive information (or messages) through comprehending that information directly in the target language. To best satisfy this condition, it makes sense that learners be led to focus on the meaning (rather than, say, the form) of what is being said, written, or signed during an activity. Krashen (1987) and common sense hold that, in order to best focus learners on the meaning of the language to which they exposed, the information conveyed should be interesting and/or relevant. In the following, I attempt to expand our framework to assess the quality of information to be exchanged in an activity in terms of how interesting and/or relevant that information is likely to be.

To begin, let us first agree on what kinds of information would be universally *un*interesting to learners. An activity in which all of the information to be exchanged is already known to all of the participants beforehand will be of little, if any, interest to the participants involved. Krashen (1987) summarizes this principle well by stating that, "If the message is completely known, it will be of no interest, and the student will probably not attend" (p. 66).

Exchanging new information is important, but what kind of new information is most likely to provoke learners' interest? If we agree that interesting information is that which directly appeals to, reflects or otherwise connects with learners' thoughts, feelings or needs, we may logically conclude that learners are more likely to be interested in information conveying their own ideas, opinions or desires than that which conveys, for example, those of the teacher or the textbook author.

Finally, let us consider the concept of relevance. If learners know that a language activity they are about to do is likely to help them in accomplishing a goal or goals of personal importance to them, they will be more likely to attend to the messages exchanged in that activity. Thus, a class of advertising majors is more likely to actively participate in an activity in which they must persuade each other to buy certain products, than in an activity which has them debate international policy

In conclusion of this section, we may add these final questions to our framework:

8. Out of the number of messages estimated in question 7, how many of those messages are likely to convey information that was previously unknown to the receiver?
9. Out of the number of messages estimated in question 7, how many of those messages are likely to convey learners' own ideas, opinions and/or desires?
10. Is the information likely to be exchanged in the activity useful for learners to

achieve a goal or goals of some personal importance and will learners be made aware of this usefulness before that information is exchanged?

Essentially, the higher the numbers estimated for questions 8 and 9 for a given activity, the higher the potential quality of the information exchanged in that activity and thus the higher that activity's communicative potential. In contrast, if the estimated number is close to zero for either question, a serious danger exists of learners not attending to and thus not fully comprehending the information exchanged. This would in turn violate the conditions for an activity to be communicative embodied in questions 3 and 4. Finally, although it is not necessary for an activity to fulfill the two conditions conveyed in question 10 for that activity to be considered communicative, communicative activities that do fulfill these conditions are likely to have a higher communicative potential than those that do not.

Conclusion

Two parts compose the framework established in this article for assessing the communicative potential of language learning activities. The first part is embodied by questions 1 through 4 and asserts that in order for an activity to be considered communicative, it must involve at least two participants both sending information to and receiving information from each other through a process of directly comprehending and producing that information in the target language.

The second part of the framework attempts to assist in comparing activities which have tentatively fulfilled the conditions in the first part of the framework by providing guidelines to assess those activities' communicative potential (or the quality and amount of interaction those activities are likely to engender). These guidelines hold that an activity's communicative potential will be higher if a) it encourages direct comprehension of the target language through both having an

outcome which provides observable evidence that learners have comprehended the language used as well as through having a suitable time limit, b) it promotes a large quantity of target language communication through requiring as many messages to be exchanged as possible for successful activity completion, c) it encourages learners to fully attend to the meaning of the target language used through promoting the exchange of information that is new, personally meaningful, and useful to learners in accomplishing their own goals.

Communicative target language activities are not the only type of activity employed in communicative language teaching, but they are necessary for a teaching approach to be considered truly communicative. Although, the framework established in this article is by no means a complete or entirely objective tool for assessing language learning activities, it does provide a relatively concise view of what it means for an activity to be called "communicative". It is my hope that, with this framework, readers will be better able to judge the communicative potential of their activities and make effective changes to them. At the least, I hope the framework serves as a starting point from which readers may begin to develop or further clarify their *own* framework for assessing the communicative potential of classroom activities.

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