

2008 Symposium Debriefing

Introduction

Masako SASAKI

Akita University

The 2008 symposium featured team teaching (TT) in English language teaching in Japan, which has a history of more than twenty years. During those years of the past, the TT by Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and assistant language teachers (ALTs) must have been recognised as an ideal English teaching form in that they complement each other. ALTs are expected to take roles of informants about their cultures and the English language use and, above all, of facilitators of communication in English in classroom, while JTEs are required to assume responsibilities to elicit cultural and linguistic information from ALTs in the course of communication involving students, ALTs, and themselves and to induce the students' second language acquisition through the communication. These expectations and requirements, however, have not been necessarily met. Four symposiasts explained to what degree or how they have been met or not in their teaching context as well as in general.

Nilau Elisa sensei, who used to be an ALT in Yuzawa and has moved to another prefecture, clarified respective essential roles taken by ALTs and JTEs in TT based on his teaching experiences particularly at elementary school. Arakawa Naomi sensei at Kotooka Junior High School reported on several communicative activities and projects, such as a gambling game for self-introduction, relay notes, and a pen-pal project, which were developed by cooperative partnership between her and her ALT colleague. Ryan Lidster sensei at Onoba Junior High School identified problems inherent in team teaching programmed into English language class which is destined to prepare the students for high school entrance examination. Suzuki Yumiko sensei at Yokote Jonan Senior High School made suggestions as to how JTEs are able to take advantage of ALTs' qualities through comparisons between TT at a base school and TT by an ALT's regular visits.

TT can head for either heaven on earth or hell on earth. The direction your TT will take may be determined by various factors including awareness about respective roles, the way and degree of cooperation, creativity in teaching material development, and willingness and action to improve TT in spite of problems around it, as were discussed in the present symposium. Like the issue of communicative language teaching featured in the 2007 symposium, TT has to be evolved into a form appropriate to maximize its benefits in English education in Japan.

To improve team teaching

Naomi ARAKAWA

Kotooka Junior High School

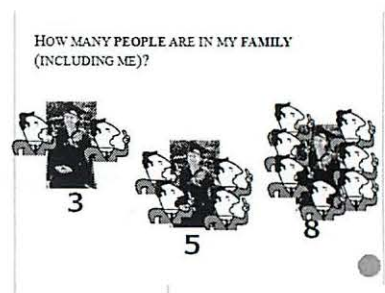
1. What is the ideal team teaching?

According to Imai Hiroyuki and Matsui Kaori, the ideal team teaching can actually be called “team learning.” This is because the “team” does not mean only the relationship between the ALT and the JTE. It should really consist of JTE, ALT and the students. So, the key to successful team-teaching is for both JTEs and ALTs to build up good relationships with the students in their classes together. I think this is true because when we teach students, if the students’ interests, characters, abilities of English, or problems go unnoticed, managing the classes becomes more difficult and the lessons are less effective.

Last year, I luckily had a chance to teach with a great ALT, Katie Post. She has been very interested in Japanese culture since she was a little girl and highly motivated to teach English in Japan.

2. Self Introduction

In our first team-teaching class, she introduced herself using PowerPoint. This presentation includes an amusing activity. Students have to bet points for each question. If they get the right answer, they get points according to their bets. The presentation was easy to understand and very effective. Students were very happy to be able to understand her English.



3. Web site

A few weeks after her arrival, she told me that she made a web site to help students study English. This site contains American culture, geography, history, and games that help students learn English. I often used this site in elective English classes. She sometimes joined the elective classes and helped me and the students did many different activities. (<http://katiesensei.googlepages.com>)

4. Relay notes

Relay notes are very popular among teachers who want to make the best use of ALTs. I

divided the classes into group of four or five students, and then I gave each group a small notebook. Students were asked to write about themselves, their families, their favorite things and so on, and passed them to the next student in their group. Then, the ALT read their writings and wrote back some comments about their journals. I saw the students were very excited when they read Katie's comments. It helped a lot to encourage students to communicate in English through writing.

5. Pen-pal project

Katie also proposed that we should establish pen-pal club. It was not compulsory, but we tried very hard to encourage students to make friends with American senior high school students who were learning Japanese. She arranged everything to make this pen-pal project, through writing e-mails to her teacher of Japanese in America. In this pen-pal project, our students wrote in English and Japanese, and students in the states wrote in Japanese so that they could practice communication through writing in foreign languages. Students who attempted this pen-pal project were so excited when they got letters from their pen-pals. Some even received American goods like coins and stationary with their letters. This project finished because Katie left Japan last August, but I thought it helped a lot to enhance students' motivation to learn English and communicate in it.

6. Real Communication in English

It is great pleasures for the students to be able to communicate with native speaker of English in class. I would like to introduce a successful class. The aim of the class was to learn how to guide the way to a certain place using trains. We had three teachers in the class: two JTEs and Katie. After learning the useful expressions for guiding the way, I told students to make skits to guide their partners to places they wanted to visit using trains. I told them to present their skit in front of me, the other JTE, or Katie. After their presentation of the skits, I told the students to try to guide Katie from a certain station to the station she wanted to go to by train. I thought this was real communication in English, but was a rather hard task for the students because they had to speak English impromptu with the ALT. This task was challenging, but students enjoyed it a lot. Students who were able to do it wrote about their great satisfaction in trying this activity on their evaluation sheets.

7. Resources for introducing foreign culture

ALTs are great resources for introducing foreign cultures. Katie told the students about American school life, foods, cultures, and so on, by showing us pictures, maps, and other props. I believe it is important for students to know about the other country's cultures when they learn

a foreign language. The more the students know about the foreign culture, the more they will be motivated to learn its language.

8. Difficulties and Problems of team-teaching with ALTs.

We used to have three ALTs in our town, but we have only one ALT now. He visits three junior high schools and many elementary schools, so he visits our school only three days a month. Currently, the ALT's few visits prevent him from building solid relationships with students in each school. I think we need more time to talk about classes and to give advice, or to exchange opinions about the classes we teach together. We should spend more time to work as colleagues.

Today we are striving to make our team-teaching, or team-learning, more effective and enjoyable for the students. I hope to find ways of managing ideal "team-learning" in exchanging ideas with other JTEs and ALTs from now on. I believe the foundation for a good relationship with one's colleagues is mutual understanding, respect, and honesty.

◆引用文献◆ 今井弘之・松井かおり(2008)「ALTとの授業がうまくいく関係性とは」『英語教育』5月号 大修館書店 pp.15-17

What can we do more to involve ALTs in English II and Reading classes?

Yumiko SUZUKI

Yokote Jonan Senior High School

I've been teaching English for 3 years at a base-school. I teach English at a visiting school now. Therefore, I can compare both schools through my experience. First, I'd like to compare differences between both schools. Next, let me write down original jobs of the ALT in the base-school. Lastly, I'd like to suggest how to improve the team teaching to cooperate with ALTs.

1. Difference in the allotment of the class

The big difference between the base-school and visiting school is the allotment of the team teaching class. The schedule is fixed in the base-school. Only the 1st grade students can take the team teaching class. But the classes for the 2nd and 3rd grade students are not organized in the schedule. So, students in the base-school can have 48 classes at most for 3 years. The curriculum in the base-school is "*intensive and short-term curriculum.*" On the other hand, the teachers can choose whether they will have team teaching class or not in the visiting school. So, every student can take the team teaching class if the teachers want to have it though an ALT visits two days a month. If the teachers are eager to have the team teaching classes, the students can have a lot of opportunities to communicate with the ALT. That is, the curriculum in the visiting school is "*extensive and long-term curriculum.*"

2. Comparison of how to organize the class

The ALT could have the initiative to handle the lessons in the base-school. The students in the base-school could have consistent classes because the ALT used the textbook and s/he organized the class. The ALT made materials based on the demand from the JTE or according to the level of the students. During the lesson, the ALT could introduce three examples of extended materials. Firstly, music was often used as an introduction of the class. The ALT had the students listen to the music and fill in the words or phrases. After that, the ALT explained useful phrases and the background of the music. Next one was essay writing. The ALT prepared the comic strip and had the students fill in the speech balloon. The students read a comic, guessed, and made a funny story. It was a good reading and writing practice. Lastly, pronunciation material. It was difficult for the students to distinguish the difference between "r" and "l" sounds, "b" and "v" sounds and various "a" sounds. The ALT dealt with these different pronunciations as a game at the beginning of a lesson.

While the ALT had consistent classes using the textbook in the base-school, the ALT in the

visiting school was flexible. Most of the JTEs in the visiting class did not prepare the textbook in the team teaching class. Therefore, the ALT arranged the content and materials that s/he had used in the base-school before.

Another approach in the visiting schools was that a JTE asked the ALT to join the classes of English I, II and Reading. The ALT mostly joined the introduction part of these lessons to have the students interested in the content of the lesson. Or the ALT was asked to explain the cultural background that was necessary for the students to understand the content better.

Lastly, there is one exception that is common to both schools: the topic of the holidays. The ALT tells the students about his/her own holiday experience and shows the pictures. The students can notice the difference between the holidays in Japan and those of the ALT's countries through the class. So, it is a good opportunity to understand their cultures deeper.

3. ALT's original work in the base-school

One of the important works in the base school is to make the listening test for a regular term test. ALTs organize the listening test script and the questions. They apply the content of the textbook. How to make the listening test depends on ALTs.

When JTEs make the test of English I, II and Reading, JTEs have an ALT double-check the expressions of the questions. In addition, the ALT's double-checking of the T/F questions are helpful when JTEs make extended materials of English I, II and Reading.

The ALT stays in the base-school during the most days of the week. Then, the ALT is more required not only to teach but to communicate with students. Information board is one of the ways to get students interested in communication with ALTs. Many pictures and messages are put on it. It connects ALTs and students even if students do not have ALT's class.

4. Conclusion

ALTs usually have a high motivation to teach students. Those ALTs' participation in English I, II and Reading is a better way to stimulate the students and understand the content deeper. Though the ALT's teaching is different and limited in both schools, s/he has many strategies of holding effective activities. As a JTE, I always think of the question : "What is the best way to involve an ALT in English I, II and Reading?" It is common to have an ALT in the introduction part of the class. But I believe it is not enough because the ALT takes great ideas of organizing classes and making extended materials. If JTE's strategies and ALT's ones are linked together, it is fruitful to motive students to understand the reading materials more dynamically. I'd like to explore the best way to teach English I, II and Reading with ALTs as my life work.

Rethinking Team Teaching: The Barriers to Improving the ALT-JTE Relationship posed by Entrance Examinations

Ryan LIDSTER

Onoba Junior High School

The Problem

While JTEs and ALTs in Japanese junior high schools have made significant steps forward since the inception of TT classes more than twenty years ago, improvement to the TT relationship remains limited by structural and administrative obstacles that position the ALT in conflict with the goals of JTEs and students. There are still stresses between ALTs and JTEs, and while the stress is not relationship-threatening, it does create tension in the TT relationship, and therefore calls for improvement. In particular, this paper argues that the root cause of tension in the TT relationship lies in the layout and requirements of the entrance examinations required for matriculation to most upper secondary schools. Specifically, high school entrance exams are designed such that student ability to produce comprehensible English in speech or writing—in short, their communicative proficiency—is largely irrelevant to achieving high test scores. Communication with the ALT and communicative activities within the classroom are therefore positioned in opposition to test preparation and, vicariously, matriculation to the student’s high school of choice.

As a result, student communication and TT as a whole are often confined to games and activities designed to improve student motivation; the ALT is used as a “carrot on a stick,” while test preparation, assignments and student evaluation are dealt with separately. While some students may choose to pursue communication with the ALT out of individual interest, those who do not share the same personal objectives usually do not. Correspondingly, the immense potential for meaningful interaction in English between students and the ALT is not fully exploited, and student communicative proficiency in English is often limited.

Hypothesis: More Focus on Communication

This paper argues that team teaching between the JTE and ALT would be best improved by incorporating more student-generated communication into the classroom and placing a greater focus on

active communication in English between the students and ALT. This should be expected to improve TT in the following ways:

- 1) Regular activities centred on communication encourage positive and meaningful working relationships between the JTE and ALT by offering mutual benefit to closer interaction;
- 2) Active communication enhances student skill acquisition in the target language and helps to deepen student understanding and boost confidence (Gass, 2003; Yashima, 2002; Cook, 1996);
- 3) As a native speaker, the ALT is uniquely well-equipped to judge whether student-created English is comprehensible (MacIntyre et al., 1998), and the ALT's sense of utility improves.

In addition, increasing communicative activities that utilise the ALT is a stated goal of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). MEXT goes further to state in their curriculum recommendations that a principle goal of English language education in junior high schools should be to develop students' ability to communicate in English (MEXT, 2008). There is a growing number of JTEs who are calling for greater focus on speaking and written prowess, and "*tsukaeru eigo*" ("useable English") is a new buzzword in many academic circles.

Despite this, however, under the current testing system, the worthy goals of increasing classroom focus on communicative abilities and incorporating active student participation teaching models such as the "triangle method" are unlikely to be achieved. Rather, in the absence of changes to testing, communication-focused classroom reform is both challenging and potentially harmful. Thus, test formatting should not be treated as a separate issue from TT improvement within the classroom. Rather, readily implementable changes to testing methods that evaluate student communicative proficiency should be expected to correspond to significant improvements in JTE and ALT cooperation as well as student-ALT interaction and perhaps even language acquisition itself.

Why Communication?

An increasingly large amount of literature in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) suggests that active interaction with the target language (L2) is indispensable for students in order to grasp complex concepts and retain more of the information they learn in class (Swain, 1985; Cook, 1999; Yabuki-Soh, 2007). This notion has, in fact, been generally accepted amongst academic circles for many years now (Naiman et al., 1975; Bley-Vroman, 1983; Krashen, 1982).

Intuitively, a student who successfully conveys meaning either in writing or speech must, in order to do so, understand what the words used mean individually and when arranged in context. Thus, they demonstrate knowledge of grammar and vocabulary simultaneously. Through the experience of physically writing or speaking, the student gains another method for remembering the words and grammar, as well as gaining confidence from the act of having their efforts to communicate in the L2 bear fruit (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Moreover, unsuccessful attempts at communication are also useful in that they reinforce the notion that grammar and correct usage (as well as spelling and pronunciation depending on the context) are important, and students have the incentive not to repeat the same mistake (Cook, 1996; Birjani and Ahangari, 2008). In short, the ability to communicate inherently demands an understanding of grammar and vocabulary, whereas knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary alone does not necessarily empower students with the ability to use them out of context.

The most important reason, however, is also one of the most commonly overlooked: namely that the ability to communicate in the L2 is, in fact, the practical goal of foreign language education. The ability to perform well on tests is of course essential as a student and applicant; however, after having graduated, there are very few real life opportunities for students to demonstrate their mastery of multiple choice grammar questions. When in contact with foreign persons, media, and literature, however, the ability to read, write in, speak in, and understand the L2 is crucial. In so much as this is true, education and testing *not* aimed towards the promotion of communicative proficiency has questionable social utility and is severely abstracted from its fundamental purpose (MacIntyre et al.).

Historical Context

This paper does not focus on the broader issue of the social and political context within which TT is conducted, but in order to address TT improvement, it is first necessary to understand the ALT's position within the Japanese education system.

The notion of the ALT was first introduced during a period of relatively high political tension between Japan and its Western allies (McConnell, 2000). The ALT was conceived in an effort to improve Japan's international image by increasing exposure of otherwise isolated areas to foreign cultures and vice versa. It was not, however, constructed as a means to improve Japan's English education as such. The ALT's position in terms of classroom teaching was therefore intentionally left vague and largely unsubstantial (McConnell).

Knowledge of the Japanese language or of the Japanese education system, specialisation in English or English language education, a teaching licence, prior experience or other qualifications in teaching was and still is not required in order to become an ALT in an effort to maximise the applicant pool. It is important to understand therefore that the ALT is first and foremost not an English teacher *per se*, but rather a type of ambassador of a foreign culture operating within schools. Test performance, English language acquisition and student retention have been separate issues from ALT-JTE cooperation, therefore, since inception.

At first this notion may induce cynicism and discomfort, as indeed it is paradoxical to employ a foreign person as an “Assistant Language Teacher” whose primary purpose is not, in fact, to “assist in language teaching.” It is also inaccurate, however, to suggest that the ALT was intended *not* to be involved in the classroom. While secondary to grassroots internationalisation, improvement in student English language ability was and remains *one* of the goals of ALT employment (MEXT, 2008). Moreover, despite initial difficulties, the program as a whole, both in terms of its political aims and in terms of improving student motivation and interest in English, has largely been hailed as a success (McConnell; Okano and Tsuchiya, 1999). Students and teachers have responded with overwhelmingly positive feedback to the implementation of the ALT (CLAIR, 2007), and ALT satisfaction has also risen significantly over the last quarter century (McConnell). Indeed, rather than the complex motivations behind ALT employment, the remarkable success of ALT-JTE team teaching is most worthy of note.

Thus, when proposing improvements to team teaching, while it is important to take into account the ALT’s political and instructional limitations, it is equally if not more important to note that those limits are themselves flexible, and that within them there is considerable room for positive effects on education and intra-systemic growth. The ALT is not hired as a grammar instructor or test adjudicator, but rather as a conduit for the exchange of culture and ideas. In other words, and at the risk of becoming overly insistent, the ALT’s role is best suited for communicative activities, *both* as a demonstrator of native usage and as a willing listener and reader of the students’ attempts at communication in the L2. To allow for ideal functioning of the JTE-ALT relationship, it is self-evident that ALTs should do the job they are best suited to do, and for which they were hired.

In addition, as the political and economic climate has changed, the need to justify ALTs’ fiscal viability has also increased. Recent data have shown that Japan’s performance on English proficiency tests lags behind its Asian competitors who spend considerably less on education. In one recent survey, Japan placed twenty-fifth out of twenty-six Asian nations in TOEFL scores of university students. The

immersion of developing economies has placed greater importance on international trade and cooperation which is conducted largely in English. Now in its adolescence and having already established a track record of success in its primary goal outside the classroom, there is demonstrable demand for the TT programme to mature and have greater impact in regards to English language acquisition as well.

The Importance of Incentives

Increasing the perceived rewards of an action will increase the likelihood of a person choosing that course of action. (For example, a person who may not have done Action X if offered only one dollar may be persuaded to do so if offered one hundred dollars.) Conversely, low perceived rewards will result in a low likelihood of people acting accordingly. It follows that, in order to enact more communicative activities in TT, the incentives for ALTs, JTEs and students must be, to a reasonable degree, aligned accordingly. While ALT incentives already favour increased communication with the students, such is not necessarily the case for JTEs and students themselves. In order to examine this, it is first necessary to attempt to define the incentives of ALTs, JTEs, and students.

ALT incentives

It is tenuous at best to make generalisations in regards to ALT motivation. While some have prior experience in teaching and/or a future desire to teach, most do not; while some go to only one or a few schools and interact regularly with the same set of students, some do not. Their reasons for coming to Japan and applying to work as ALTs are equally as diverse as their cultural backgrounds and work habits. For some, the degree of enthusiasm for English education is not high as some ALTs choose to come to Japan with the goal of experiencing different facets of Japanese culture (JET Programme, 2007). Yet as disparate as ALTs and their positions are, it is not impossible to posit some commonalities with a degree of confidence. Aside from exceptional cases, it can be said that:

- 1) ALTs wish to have positive working relationships with their co-workers;
- 2) ALTs wish to have their skill sets utilised and be useful to students and teachers in a way that allows them to take pride and satisfaction in their work.

These assumptions are supported by data from ALT surveys conducted annually (Akita Prefectural Research Center, 2008). Moreover, these incentives are compatible with the goal of increasing student-generated communication in the classroom. The ALT can provide an invaluable source of information on how to express one's ideas naturally, and the ALT can gauge whether the students' attempt at communication is successful. This is something the ALT is uniquely well-equipped to do as a native

speaker, ensuring that their skills are utilised and that they feel they provide a valuable addition to the classroom (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Furthermore, both successful and unsuccessful examples of communication are best put to use by review and analysis by the JTE. This ensures that the ALT has high incentives to cooperate with the JTE as well. A higher focus on communicative activities also places higher demand on ALT-JTE cooperation in lesson planning, which is essential to the incentives above.

Student incentives

As with ALTs, student incentives are as varied as the students themselves. Some have an interest in foreign relations, media, culture, travel, or other topics and through that have an incentive to communicate with the ALT, but some do not share that interest. Some may wish to learn to communicate out of an intrinsic love of learning, and some may wish to use English in their future career paths, but these are not valid as generalisations for all students or even most. It is sound to say, however, that junior high school students desire to achieve the marks and test scores necessary to attend the high school or other institution of their choice. For some, that may mean that very high test scores are necessary; for others, lower scores are needed, but all students who plan to attend high school (about 97% of junior high school students according to MEXT) require the grades and test scores necessary to do so. It can be further generalised that students wish to achieve these scores with the minimum required amount of effort to do so, and thus they seek the most effective and efficient way for them to learn the skills necessary.

Whether this set of incentives is compatible with increasing focus on student-generated communication in the classroom depends on whether communicative abilities are required to achieve the grades and test scores they desire. Certainly, implementing communicative activities is possible even without any student assent, but student enthusiasm for and participation in these activities should be expected to be higher if the perceived reward for active participation is also high. The opposite is also true in the case of low expected returns. It is therefore important to establish that, first, an increase in communicative ability likely corresponds to an increase in test scores, and second, that the students perceive the relationship between marks and communicative proficiency as positively correlated.

JTE Incentives

The incentives of JTEs are also complex and pose obstacles to making generalisations. There are countless reasons for becoming an English teacher, and the desire to impart a love of English or English communicative ability on students may not necessarily be the JTE's primary motivation. The complex dynamic of Japanese staff rooms with their diverse demands on teachers also has an effect on the

perceived benefits of certain courses of action. If one is not exceedingly cynical, however, JTE incentives can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The JTE wishes to teach such that the students will be most likely to achieve their academic and personal goals;
- 2) The JTE wishes to be evaluated as doing his/her job well by superiors, peers, and students;
- 3) The JTE wishes to help students achieve their goals in the easiest way possible so as not to spend (or force students to spend) excessive amounts of time or effort

It can therefore be said that JTE incentives naturally are aligned with student incentives. Students wish to achieve their academic and personal goals, and teachers aim to assist them in doing so. The question of whether these goals are in line with increasing student-based communicative activities is therefore the same for students as it is for teachers. Put simply, if improvement in communicative proficiency has a perceived positive correlation with academic achievement and test scores, teacher incentives to cultivate communicative proficiency will be strong. Conversely, if communicative proficiency is seen as largely irrelevant to achieving academic goals, then teachers will have a strong disincentive to spend time to that end as it would take away from time that could be spent on activities with more direct benefit.

JTE perceptions in this matter are perhaps the most important in that JTEs, unlike ALTs or students, determine the course of study, assign homework, make tests, and thus are most responsible for deciding which skill's development is given the most weight. Unlike students and ALTs, JTEs also have considerable experience with the entrance exams and have already taken them themselves. They are thus in a much better position to judge what skills are and are not necessary.

In summation

Making generalisations inevitably requires that important details and conditions are omitted. While not discussed here, individual personality and interpersonal relationships can play an important role in language learning (Shumann, 1978; Skehan, 1989), and the need to vary lesson material and create enjoyable lessons is also apparent (Dornyei, 2005). Evaluating the situation from a very basic level of cost-benefit analysis, however, it can still be said that ALTs have strong incentives to promote student communication. On the other hand, if individual circumstances are removed, it can be said that students have incentive to do communicative activities over other forms of studying only in so much as they

perceive that it will have a greater positive effect on their broader academic goals. By extension, JTEs also have an incentive to incorporate a greater focus on communication only in so much as they perceive that it will enhance student academic performance.

Therefore, the entrance examinations that are central to student academic progress are also central to the problem. If communicative proficiency is required in order to achieve high marks on the high school entrance examinations, then it becomes essential to promote that skill's development, and both JTEs and students will have strong incentives to do so. If not, then both JTEs and students will have weak incentives to do so. It follows that, in order to incorporate greater focus on communication in the classroom, it is first necessary that the exams place weight on communicative prowess (Bachman, 1990). Assuming that communicative proficiency is in fact a central goal as stated by MEXT, and rephrasing this conclusion from a test writer's perspective, we can summarise that:

To enact more communicative activities in the classroom and thus to promote student communicative abilities in English, it is necessary that the tests evaluate the ability of students to communicate in English.

The Current Tests

It can be unambiguously shown, however, that the high school entrance examinations currently used by public schools across the country do not place emphasis on student communicative proficiency. This can be shown in several ways.

Space for Student Writing

Evaluating speaking abilities on national entrance exams is a near practical impossibility, and thus in order to evaluate the ability of students to create their own meaningful statements in English, their writing skills must be tested. On many current nationally-used exam answer sheets, however, there is only one space allotted for student-generated writing. In addition, taking the example of the English entrance exam from Akita prefecture in 2008, even if we evaluate the English that students are asked to extract and copy directly from the text as examples of student writing in English—which is, needless to say, a questionable source for evaluating communicative ability—there are then still only three spaces allotted on the entire exam which account in total for 10% of the final grade.

On the other hand, there are five such spaces allotted for writing in Japanese (accounting for 15% of the total score), and when taking into account single-word answer spaces and multiple choice blanks, a student who completes the exam answers more questions in Japanese than in English by a ratio of more

than 2:1. While the texts and vocabulary used vary, it should be noted that the exams used in the prefectures of Chiba, Aomori, Hyogo, Iwate, Osaka, and Ehime did not deviate significantly from these ratios and percentages and that none required more than five sentences of English writing.¹

Content of the Composition Question(s)

Even within the limited space for student-generated composition, however, students are not asked to demonstrate command of the grammar or vocabulary they learn as third-year students. Returning to the Akita prefecture exam for 2008, in the sole composition question, students were asked to write three sentences in English about a hobby of their choice. The answer sheet provides two examples of a model student response:

“I like playing baseball because it’s very exciting. I started playing baseball when I was ten. I want to be a good baseball player like Ichiro.”

“My hobby is cooking. I cook with my mother every Sunday. I like making sandwiches. My father enjoys eating my sandwiches.”

Taking aside the content itself and the question of whether or not one’s father’s enjoyment of sandwiches falls under the bracket of one’s hobby, there is no example of grammar or vocabulary presented in the students’ third year of study contained in the samples. Passive voice, the present perfect tense, relative pronouns, and even simply words from the third-year course of study are entirely absent. Moreover, this is not simply an example of a satisfactory answer, but rather the two samples are suggested as *ideal* student responses requiring no further addition to obtain a perfect score. In fact, it is theoretically possible to receive full marks on this question without including even second-year grammar and vocabulary, as use thereof does not fall under the evaluation criteria. In short, students at no point in the exam are required to demonstrate their ability to communicate at a third-year level in writing.

Lack of Native English in Writing Samples

While less directly demonstrative of communication skills, being able to interpret written English shows the students’ grasp of vocabulary and how those words are used to create meaning. Given this, students and JTEs would have strong incentives in the very least to have the ALT help explain native word usage and perhaps create writing samples that could be used for test practice. However, the actual exam’s

¹ It is possible that other prefectures also followed this format, but given time constraints only the tests from the prefectures listed above were examined in this study.

writing samples contain several examples of mistakes that are not readily understandable by a native speaker and are thus not strongly correlated to reading activities involving the ALT. For the sake of consistency, below are some examples from the same Akita prefectural exam as before:

- *“But it is also important to think what they need.”*

“Can Japanese people go to U.S.A. on the program?”

These are examples of “overt errors” – that is to say, outright grammatical mistakes.

The United States is missing an article, and the verb “to think,” which cannot normally take a direct object, is used incorrectly.

- *“I met many Japanese people who joined this program at Narita airport.”*

While grammatically sound, this is an example of incorrect contextual usage. The verb “to join” is incorrectly used to signify program participation.

- *“I believed the plan would give them a chance to get money. I thought it would also give a chance to some Japanese people.”*

This is perhaps a more important example of unnatural English for the point at hand.

The second sentence is both grammatically sound and employs correct word usage in context, yet a native speaker has difficulty understanding it because of the sentence’s internal rhythm and parallels with the sentence preceding it.

As evidence that these errors are not limited to one test or one prefecture, the following example from the 2007 test in Chiba prefecture contains both grammatical and contextual errors in the same sentence:

- *“Because he was surprised Mark’s parents asked him a problem.”* This is both a sentence fragment and curiously pairs “a problem” with the verb “to ask.”

There are plentiful other examples from other tests (as well as more examples from both of the tests cited above), but the point is clear without further nitpicking. While some mistakes are inevitable in the test-making process, the number and nature of the mistakes makes it abundantly clear that native

speakers first did not write the test samples, and second were not employed to any significant degree in the editing of those samples. The texts contained in the entrance exams are not examples of native English, and it is therefore questionable to what degree reading samples of native English and having the ALT explain native usage is effective as test preparation in comparison to taking sample exams and other studying methods. Indeed, it could even be argued that if an ALT had, for example, insisted on explaining the correct native usage of the verb “to join” or “to think,” students in that class might have been confused and distressed when taking the 2008 Akita exam.

The Failure of the Current Tests and Need for Change

It is clear from the evidence above that the exams as they are currently designed fail to test students on their ability to communicate in English. A student who writes not a single word of English on the exam can receive up to 76% on both of the tests cited, and students who do not use any of the grammar or vocabulary from their third-year course material in their own original writing can receive up to a perfect score. Passing the entrance exams is therefore not proof of a student’s ability to use the grammar and vocabulary learned in the course of study, and vicariously failing the exams is not necessarily proof of a student’s lack of ability to do so. Consequently, the tests approved by MEXT cannot be said to satisfy the goals the Ministry itself espouses, and the tests not only fail as evaluators of student communicative ability, but indeed they fail *as exams* (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

It further follows that, given the current exams, improving a student’s communicative proficiency in English and increasing focus on communication in the classroom are not in line with student and JTE incentives to achieve high test scores. While students may not necessarily be aware of this, JTEs most likely are. It is only natural that JTEs are then hesitant to incorporate greater communication-focused activities—or indeed, activities that involve the ALT at all—except to ensure that students remain motivated and interested in learning as this is essential for overall student performance (Gardner, 2001; MacIntyre, 2002). Hence, the ALT’s current limited use as a “carrot on a stick” is highly predictable and appropriate in regards to exam preparation as focusing heavily on classroom communication is not necessarily the most effective method for addressing the students’ priorities.

In terms of the student’s needs, the ability to speak English as a 15-year-old pales in comparison to the ability to enter the student’s high school of choice and continue to advance academically and socially. It is therefore both ineffective and, to a degree, irresponsible to recommend enacting changes in the classroom without first addressing the abundant failures in the entrance exams themselves.

What Change Entails

There is much disagreement amongst scholars as to how to effectively test communicative competence, yet there is no disagreement that without having the students actually attempt communication in the L2, any attempt to extrapolate student levels of communicative proficiency is impossible (Corder, 1967; Crookes, 1991; Nassaji, 2004). The focus of this paper is not to lay out a new examination format as such. Rather, this paper argues simply that students must be made to demonstrate their ability to use the grammar and vocabulary in writing.

For the sake of clarification, however, one specific form of change possible is to remove questions that ask for single word answers from long writing passages (for example, 「長文の(1)にあてはまるものを、次のア～エから一つ選び記号で書きなさい」 「(2)にあてはまる語を英語一語で書きなさい」 etc.). These are inefficient as sources of data in that they can by their nature only test a single grammar point at a time. They do not test a student's ability to understand the meaning of the entire passage and interpret the reading, but rather only test memorisation of a particular rule within a particular word formation (Rubin, 1975). Extraction questions (抜き書き) are similarly only effective at testing a single grammar point and do not require students to understand what is being said in the text that they are asked to copy. On the other hand, they take considerable time to answer, and may be difficult for those with excellent reading ability who simply have less effective test-taking strategies and time management. These questions are abundant on English tests, but they are largely irrelevant to a student's ability to communicate in English and their validity as questions and as a method of questioning should be seriously re-evaluated. Indeed, if the students were simply given the individual sentence from which the problem was derived and asked the same question, instead of hiding the sentence in long paragraphs, the end result in terms of knowledge demonstrated would remain the same.

In place of these and other questions with dubious utility, the exams are in need of a space in which students are asked to write in English using the grammar and/or vocabulary they have learned. Ideally, this would involve a critical thinking problem or a form of short composition that could not easily be prepared in advance. The potential forms of questions that can evaluate student written proficiency, though, are innumerable. Regardless of the direction that the changes take, it is clear that the exams as they stand currently are indefensible. Change to them as such is necessary, in the very least by having one of the thousands of native speakers currently in the Ministry's employment edit the exam drafts to catch overt errors.

Why Haven't the Exams Already Changed?

Discouragingly, very little of this paper presents new information. The ineffectiveness of the exams, the low student ability to communicate, the inevitable and unnecessary tension between ALTs and JTEs over ALTs' utility in the classroom, and the necessity to introduce greater communication-based evaluation are not new ideas. Despite this, change remains distant. Given the severity of the situation, it is important to ask why change hasn't been quicker.

Communicative Proficiency is Difficult to Mark

This is often cited as a reason for the current test format, and the idea itself contains some logic. Multiple choice and extraction questions or other problems that require students to copy samples of the text word for word can be graded by teachers who have no knowledge of English. Increasing the amount of student writing requires a higher level of English competence on behalf of those marking the exams, and as such is inconvenient and impractical.

This complaint, however, is groundless upon closer inspection. The notion that marking exams that are so important should be a near thoughtless endeavour that can be easily done by someone with no expertise in the field is absurd. Indeed, it can be argued that the exams fail as indicators of student communicative competence unless they at some point require a degree of communicative competence in English to mark.

Communicative Proficiency is Time-Consuming to Mark

According to this reasoning, reading the students' writing and evaluating its correctness takes considerably more time than marking multiple choice questions or other questions with a single correct answer. Teachers are required to mark hundreds of exams in a very short period of time. Especially without the help of teachers who specialise in other subjects, it is too time-consuming to include large writing sections in the exams.

The concern is real, and increasing student writing sections will increase marking time, but that is not sufficient reason to prevent change to the current exams. Efficiency of marking does not justify inappropriateness of exam content or question style. To demonstrate this point, as an extreme example, it would be more time-efficient from a marking perspective to have the entire exam consist of one multiple choice question, but that of course would defeat the purpose of giving the exam in the first place. Effective evaluation of student communicative proficiency is more time-consuming, more important and more useful than hollow evaluation of grammar memorisation.

Communicative Proficiency is Subjective to Mark

This argument holds that, whereas questions that have a single correct answer have a single correct evaluation, students' original writing opens up grounds for variability in student score depending on the adjudicator. In cases where one point can make the difference between a student's acceptance into or rejection from a senior high school, this concern clearly demands serious attention.

This concern also, however, does not stand up to scrutiny. The notion that students will be graded based on their opinions and written personality is mistaken. Simply put, junior high school students have not learned enough grammar or vocabulary by the end of three years of English study to be graded on the flow, persuasiveness or aesthetic appeal of their writing style. Rather, grammatical and orthographic correctness (which are objective), as well as inclusion and correct usage of required grammatical elements (also objective), are more appropriate tools for evaluating student responses. By determining the weight of the different types of errors in advance, the room for subjectivity in marking becomes extremely small. Thus, in the context of these exams, including large student writing sections does not dramatically increase the subjectivity of exam marking.

Moreover, there already is a writing section on the exams; the problem is not whether or not to have a section of allegedly subjective marking, but rather how much weight it is given and how much is demanded of the answer(s). JTEs also have no doubt experienced that even questions to which there was intended to be only one answer often are later revealed to have subtle grey zones which are left to the discretion of the marker even within the current exams. Thus, the question of subjectivity is really a question of degree, and as shown above, that degree does not significantly change with increases to the size and weight of the writing section.

The Students Have Difficulty Learning to Write

Many teachers voice concerns that, the larger the writing section and the more weight it is given, the more students will fail the exams. Students allegedly have immense difficulty in and anxiety towards writing in English, and it is difficult to prepare students for larger writing sections where the answer must be thought of on the spot. We would therefore expect to see many blank responses and a dramatic increase in student stress.

This argument, however, is logically flawed in multiple ways. As shown earlier, the students aren't currently tested on their ability to use the grammar and vocabulary in writing on the exams, so their actual ability to write is not currently quantifiable. They have not prepared for exams that require their

use of the grammar and vocabulary, and it is thus impossible for us to judge in advance whether or not they would be able to adapt to these hypothetical changes. It may be necessary to adjust the difficulty level and expectations of the exam questions over time, but the necessity of evaluating student communicative proficiency remains unchanged.

More importantly, however, is that students who aren't able to write in English at a third-year level *should*, in fact, not do well on the exams. Students who are able to communicate should be graded highly as such, and students for whom the ability to understand and use English remains elusive should find high test marks to be equally so. That is exactly the point.

It's not for JTEs or ALTs to Decide

In the Japanese education system, it is not easy to enact systematic change from the bottom-up. Even if JTEs, ALTs, and students across Japan unanimously agreed that the exams should be changed to allow for greater focus on communication in the classroom (which of course is not the case), it would still not necessarily result in changes to exam formatting in the short-term. It is not the intent of this paper, however, to advocate that JTEs unilaterally change exams, but rather simply to demonstrate that the exams unequivocally require change. It is high time that the exams given to students reflect the values the examinees themselves espouse. The political ease and practicality of implementing that change is, obviously, irrelevant to the real needs of students and of Japanese foreign language education as a whole.

Conclusion

According to leading experts in SLA, EFL, and even MEXT itself, implementing more communication-based activities in the classroom would be effective from a teaching perspective, a team-teaching perspective, and also from a learning perspective. By making use of ALTs for who they are—a native user of the L2, not a grammar instructor—communicative activities increase ALT utility and satisfaction, while simultaneously helping the students to learn and remember the grammar and vocabulary, and offering great incentives for increased cooperation and interaction between ALTs and JTEs.

The benefits to increasing communicative activities are great, but the disincentives to do so remain prohibitively high because of the constraints of the high school entrance examination system. The exams do not evaluate student ability to communicate in English, and as such, student and JTE incentives to focus on communicative ability is low, and JTEs and ALTs are unnecessarily positioned in conflict with each other. In order to achieve better team teaching, it is therefore necessary to change the format of the

high school entrance exams themselves. JTEs, ALTs, and administrators largely are already aware of this need; it requires only the courage and conviction to act on it.

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