

Integrated Language Activities in Senior High School English Textbooks

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1. Introduction

In response to the general criticism that Japanese people often lack the communication skills in practical situations (Morizumi, 2003; Ota, 1994), the English language education policies in Japan have begun to place particular emphasis on developing these skills (Takanashi, 2000). For example, in 2003, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, Sports and Technology (henceforth, Ministry of Education, for short) announced the so-called *Action plan to cultivate Japanese with English abilities*, which places its focus on communication skills by setting the goals for all Japanese nationals. At the same time the Ministry of Education stipulated, in the overall objectives put forth in its respective Course of Study for elementary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools, that developing the students' communication abilities should be given the first priority, along with deepening their understanding of language and culture and fostering a positive attitude in them toward communication in general (Ministry of Education, 2008a, 2008b, 2009).

In order to achieve these objectives, teachers are in need of conducting their language activities in the classroom with a task authenticity: a task authenticity is concerned with 'whether real communication takes place and whether the target language has been used for a genuine purpose' (Guariento & Morley, 2001:349), and it is considered as an essential key to facilitating language learning (Lee, 1995; Tanaka, 1994; Widdowson, 1996).

In measuring the extent to which certain activities contain the necessary task authenticity, criteria such as the adoption of pair/group activities, the open-endedness of activities, and the adoption of integrated language activities, have been considered useful because communication does not take place without the existence of other people, and in real communication, there are no ready-made answers (McDonough & Shaw, 2003) and more than two different language skills are usually involved. Of these criteria, considering the fact that almost no research has been conducted in this area, this study takes up the issue of the integrated language activities in senior high school English textbooks—the issue which is characterized as one of the essential ingredients of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983).

2. Literature review

There are some studies which analyze activities from viewpoints similar to the present study such as Egusa and Yokoyama (2007, 2008), Muroi (2006), and Okita (1993). For example, Okita (1993) focused on tasks found in various textbooks, with an aim to identifying differences between tasks used in Japanese textbooks and those used in U.S. textbooks for ESL (i.e., English as a second language) and further to discussing whether communicative tasks used in U.S. textbooks for ESL could be introduced into Japanese textbooks. For this purpose, he analyzed three types of textbooks: (1) 21 textbooks used in Japanese junior high schools, (2) three textbooks used in Japanese senior high schools, and (3) five textbooks used in ESL classes at high schools in the U.S. He compared them on the following five criteria: task continuity, task integrity, task reality, cultural understanding, and task creativity.

The results of the analysis showed that significant differences were found between textbooks used in Japan and those in U.S. in all criteria except task integrity, such that textbooks used in Japanese secondary schools (1) had no concept of task continuity, (2) adopted much fewer real-life tasks than those used in U.S., (3) adopted much fewer number of cultural understanding tasks, and (4) much fewer number of creative communicative tasks. In conclusion, he suggested that textbooks used in Japanese secondary schools should introduce tasks with more elements of continuity, authenticity, cultural understanding and creativity.

While it can be positively evaluated that his study compared textbooks used in Japan and those used in the ESL context in the U.S., whereby unveiling the characteristics of Japanese English textbooks, he did not directly address the issue of the integrated language activities. It appears that studies directly focused on integrated language skills in textbooks are so far limited to Wakaari (2005).

Wakaari's study, conducted in 2005, investigated some English language textbooks used in Japanese junior high schools from the standpoint of CLT, under which influence the Japanese Education Ministry's Course of Study for junior high schools (1998) must have been written (Takanashi, Ushiro, and Adachi, 1999; Wada, 1999). The evaluation criteria were set up on the basis of the major characteristics of CLT and CLT-based materials, including integrated language activities.

The results of the study on integrated language activities showed that the textbooks in question adopted such activities for more than one third of all the activities. Especially, one textbook contained integrated language activities for nearly half. However, a further analysis

of the study revealed that more than 70% of these supposedly integrated tasks involved only listening and speaking. In the case of another textbook, the ratio of listening and speaking activities exceeded 85%, which indicates that there were only a limited percentage of activities with other skills combined. Furthermore, none of the textbooks under discussion required the students to listen and read, or to speak and read. Worse yet, none of them adopted more than one activities in which three language skills or more are involved.

On the other hand, the study also revealed that there were some activities, each one of which cannot be regarded as an integrated activity in itself, but because they have elements of continuity between one and another activity, they are virtually considered as equivalents of integrated language activities. However, such activities are small in number, and thus the study concluded that these textbooks' adoption of integrated language activities did not totally reflect CLT, but did so only partially. The study also pointed out that the textbooks under analysis did not consider the balance in the combination of the four language skills, which fact may be partly attributable to the emphasis on listening and speaking demanded by the English language teaching policy prevalent at that time.

While the results of and the recommendations drawn from the study offered a starting point for furthering the development of textbooks, the study had some limitations in its design and scope; it had analyzed only a few units out of those textbooks and did not distinguish between activities and activity items in the analysis. Therefore, the results may not represent the whole picture of textbooks, which begs for a need to do more thorough analysis of this issue.

3. Methods

3.1 Research questions

The research questions of this new study are set as follows:

- (1) To what extent are activity items involving integrated language skills adopted in senior high school textbooks?
- (2) What combinations of the four skills are involved in the integrated language activities?

The term “activity item” is defined as an item which is contained in one activity. For instance, Activity A shown below has only one item, while Activity B is considered to have five items. (The underlined sentences are given in the Japanese vernacular.)

Activity A

Listen to the English conversation and answer the questions.

1. Why does the flight attendant talk to Yuki?

(_____)

(*Sunshine English Course 1*, 2002:45)



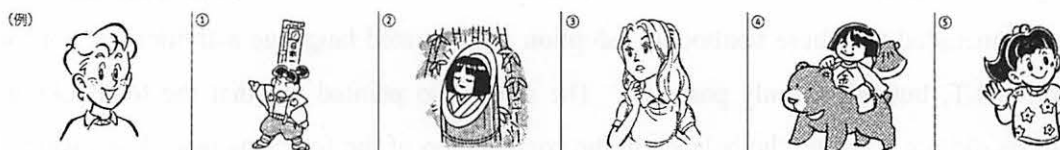
Activity B

Who is this?

Who are the people in the pictures below? Following the example, have a conversation with your friend.

(e.g.) *A:* Who's this boy?

B: He's Tom.



(*New Crown English Series 1*, 2002:45)

3.2 Textbooks to be evaluated

To answer the research questions, an analysis was conducted of some textbooks designed for "English I", a course which the largest number of Japanese students take among the English-related courses. It is also one of the base courses for starting the study of English at the level of senior high schools.

Of the textbooks for "English I", the following textbooks were selected: *Crown English Series I (New Edition)* (2006, Sanseido); *Prominence English I* (2006, Tokyo Shoseki); *Pro-Vision English Course I (New Edition)* (2006, Kirihara Shoten); and *Voyager English Course I (New Edition)* (2006, Daiichi Gakushusha). These textbooks were published by companies which kept the largest share in the number of adoptions for "English I" (Watanabe, 2005). The four textbooks were also ones targeting students with advanced English skills, which makes it possible to carry out a comparative analysis among them.

3.3 Criteria for evaluation

The criteria for evaluating integrated language activities were developed on the basis of Ishida (1993) and Okita (1993), which are concerned with how many of the four language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing) are involved in completing the activities. The

present research defines an integrated language activity as an activity involving more than one language skills.

In examining the activities, they were first classified into four groups, according to the number of language skills involved. Then, after classification, they were further examined as to what type of combinations of language skills are involved in them. This procedure brought forth the conclusion that activities were virtually divided into the following 15 groups: namely, activities involving (1) listening only; (2) speaking only; (3) reading only; (4) writing only; (5) listening and speaking; (6) listening and reading; (7) listening and writing; (8) speaking and reading; (9) speaking and writing; (10) reading and writing; (11) listening, speaking and reading; (12) listening, speaking and writing; (13) listening, reading and writing; (14) speaking, reading and writing; and (15) all the four skills combined (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Thus, in the case of the two activities illustrated below, Activity C is classified not as an integrated language activity, since it involves writing only. On the other hand, Activity D is considered an integrated language activity involving three language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, and reading), as it not only requires the students to listen and speak to their partner, but also read the phrases written below the pictures. (The underlined sentences are given in Japanese.)

Activity C

Basic exercises Describe the pictures, following the example.

(e.g.) Two pens.



(e.g.)



1



2

(*New Horizon English Course 1*, 2002:42)

Activity D

Let's Try: You are very busy this week and have to decline your friend's invitation.

Following the example, have a conversation about the pictures below.

(e.g.) A: Will you come to my house after school?

B: I'm sorry. I can't. I have to help Ms. Yamada today.

(e.g.) Monday (today)

1. Wednesday

2. Friday



help Ms. Yamada



practice the piano



go to juku

(*Sunshine English Course 2*, 2002:41)

4 Results and discussions

Table 1 shows the number of activity items contained in the four selected textbooks. As shown in the table, a total of 2,305 activity items were analyzed in this study.

Table 1 Number of activity items analyzed

Textbook	A	B	C	D	Total
Activity items	635	728	396	546	2,305

Table 2 shows the number of language skills involved in activity items adopted in the textbooks, along with their ratio in the total number of activities. According to the table, most activity items in the textbooks involve two or more language skills, while those involving only one language skill account for about a quarter—especially in Textbook D, the ratio of activity items involving one language skill is only 13%. This seems to indicate that the textbooks under analysis are all employing this aspect of CLT, which fact differs from the earlier analysis of junior high school textbooks, since the latter study had shown that the ratio of activities involving more than one language skills was less than two fifths (37.4%) on average (Wakaari, 2005). Given that the results of the present study were correspondent to Okita's (1993), in which senior high school textbooks have higher task integrity than that of junior high school textbooks, this difference may be attributable to the different levels of learners' language skills (Okita, 1993).

Table 2 Number of language skills involved in the activity items

Textbook	A	B	C	D	Total
N	635	728	396	546	2,305
Zero(%)	1 (0.2%)	15 (2.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (0.4%)	18 (0.8%)
One (%)	206 (32.4%)	213 (29.3%)	87 (22.0%)	71 (13.0%)	577 (25.0%)
Two (%)	174 (27.4%)	314 (43.1%)	182 (46.0%)	300 (54.9%)	970 (42.1%)
Three (%)	228 (35.9%)	183 (25.1%)	124 (31.3%)	172 (31.5%)	707 (30.7%)
Four (%)	26 (4.1%)	3 (0.4%)	3 (0.8%)	1 (0.2%)	33 (1.4%)

However, a closer analysis on what combinations of language skills are adopted in the activity items which involved more than one language skills revealed that the combination of language skills with the highest frequency in all the textbooks is reading and writing, which accounts for nearly three fourths on average (see Table 3). This tendency is particularly notable in Textbook D, which involves reading and writing for more than 90% of the activities. This imbalance in the proportion may suggest that integrated language activities are not adequately considered in the textbooks under analysis.

Table 3 Types of skills in the activity items which involve two language skills

Textbook	A	B	C	D	Total
N	174	314	182	300	970
Listening & Speaking (%)	2 (1.1%)	47 (15.0%)	3 (18.2%)	1 (0.3%)	53 (5.5%)
Listening & Reading (%)	19 (10.9%)	44 (14.0%)	23 (14.9%)	24 (8.0%)	110 (11.3%)
Listening & Writing (%)	11 (6.3%)	4 (1.3%)	4 (29.8%)	0 (0.0%)	19 (2.0%)
Speaking & Reading (%)	66 (37.9%)	6 (1.9%)	2 (37.1%)	0 (0.0%)	74 (7.6%)
Speaking & Writing (%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Reading & Writing (%)	79 (43.7%)	213 (67.8%)	150 (82.4%)	275 (91.7%)	714 (73.6%)

Furthermore, as shown in the example activity below, most of these integrated activities simply ask learners to complete an imperfect sentence by rearranging the given words in the parentheses, which is counted as involving reading and writing. (The underlined sentences are given in Japanese.) This raises a question about whether activities such as this can really be classified as “integrated” language activities.

Check: Complete the sentence by rearranging the words in the round brackets.

(certain / is / it / Mike / that / will) win the game.

(*Voyager English Course I*, 2006:99)

As far as the combinations of language skills in the activity items involving three language skills are concerned (see Table 4), the activity items with the highest frequency involve speaking, reading and writing, which accounts for over three fourths of all the textbooks on average; especially in Textbook A, over 95% of the activities involve these three skills.

Table 4 Types of skills in the activity items which involve three language skills

Textbook	A	B	C	D	Total
N	228	183	124	172	707
L ^a , S ^b & R ^c (%)	2 (0.9%)	57 (31.1%)	30 (24.2%)	49 (28.5%)	138 (19.5%)
L, S & W ^d (%)	3 (1.3%)	6 (3.3%)	1 (0.8%)	4 (2.3%)	14 (2.0%)
L, R & W (%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (4.4%)	6 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (2.0%)
S, R & W (%)	223 (97.8%)	112 (61.2%)	87 (70.2%)	119 (69.2%)	541 (76.5%)

Note. ^a“L” stands for “Listening.” ^b“S” stands for “Speaking.” ^c“R” stands for “Reading.”
^d“W” stands for “Writing.”

However, a closer analysis of the activities involving three language skills reveals that, as shown in the example activity below, most of the activities are those which simply ask learners to say the sentence which they have completed by filling in the blanks. Given the fact that the sole difference between the two example activities (i.e., one involving reading and writing, and

the other involving speaking, reading, and writing) lies in the presence or absence of the instructions asking learners to say the completed sentences, it is questionable whether such an activity can be categorized as a true integrated language activity which will contribute to developing their communication skills. (The underlined sentences are given in Japanese.)

Complete the following sentences by filling in some appropriate words in the parentheses so that the two sentences in each pair will have almost the same meaning, and say these sentences aloud.

e.g.) I felt that human life was short.

→I felt the (shortness) of human life.

1. I felt that human imagination was vast.

→I felt the () of human imagination.

2. His job is taking photographs.

→He is a ().

3. I felt free after this experience.

→This experience gave me a sense of ().

4. It was difficult for his father to decide.

→That was a difficult () for his father.

(*Crown English Series*, 2006:32)

Considering this lack of quality in these activities as well as the unbalanced figures of ratios, it must be said that, although the textbooks do adopt CLT in terms of quantity by providing a number of activity items involving integrated language skills, their reflection of CLT is not adequate.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary and recommendations

As shown heretofore, the analysis of the textbooks has made it clear that the textbooks are adopting a certain number of integrated language activities, yet a closer analysis reveals that most of these integrated language activities are limited to those involving (1) reading and writing, or (2) speaking, reading, and writing, and there are not many activities which accommodate other combinations of language skills. Given that integrated language activities require the students to use language in a comprehensive manner (Shirahata et al., 1999), it is recommended that the textbooks adopt integrated language activities involving many other combinations of language skills, which will help students develop their communication skills further.

Furthermore, the analysis has raised a question on the definition of integrated language activities, since many activity items which are counted as “integrated language activities” do not

seem to have task authenticity. Concerning this issue, as Ishida (1993), Okita (1993), and Miura (2000) suggest, it is important for these activity items to have relevance to and continuity with other activity items, as shown in an example activity below. (The underlined sentences are given in Japanese.) In this activity, listening and writing are involved in the THINK stage, while in the WRITE stage reading and writing are integrated, and in the SPEAK UP stage listening and speaking are combined. By having this much variety, these series of activity items will function as more authentic language activities. It is also important that college entrance examinations, for instance, will give more questions which are similar to these activity items, as they will lead the prospective students to practice such activities more seriously.

THINK and SPEAK UP

THINK

1. Answer the questions by listening to the conversation between Eri and John on the relationship between migratory birds and the light pollution.

① What are they talking about?

They are talking about _____.

② Why do some many migratory birds die?


Because light from buildings seem to _____.

③ What are they going to do at the school festival?

They are going to _____.

WRITE

2. Complete the passage in the poster which explains the issue of the light pollution to visitors to the school festival by writing sentences on this issue in English.

Why is this city so bright at night?	
	<p>Isn't this picture beautiful? It is a picture of New York in the United States at night taken from space. The bright areas are lights from the cities.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Come and take a look at it in our classroom with your own eyes!</p>
<p>Date November 25th, 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.</p> <p>Place Class 1-C, 3F</p>	

SPEAK UP

3. Present your explanation sentences for the poster in class and discuss with your classmates what should be written on the poster.

(*Pro-Vision English Course I*, 2006:117)

5.2 Limitations of the present study and its future goals

As with all studies, this research suffers from several limitations. One limitation of the research is that, due to time constraints, the study evaluated only four of the thirty-five textbooks available for the course 'English I' in Japanese senior high schools. This indicates that the study cannot claim to cover all Japanese school textbooks. Second, the fact that only one researcher evaluated the textbooks, as indeed is the case with this study, might portend that the results of the investigation may be less reliable than when more than one researchers are involved in the evaluation. Third, the study did not examine at what level or levels the four skills are involved (e.g., level of words, sentences, discourses), nor whether the activity items have relevance to or continuity with other activity items. Such detailed analyses, if conducted, might offer deeper insights into the nature of integrated language activities adopted in English textbooks used in the Japanese educational context. Thus, the existence of these apparent limitations shows that there is still room for verification with other English textbooks, a need to involve more researchers in this area, as well as a need to do a more thorough analysis.

In spite of these limitations, however, it is hoped that this research will contribute to going even one step forward toward gaining deeper insights into the nature of integrated language activities adopted in English textbooks for Japanese students. The recommendations presented so far in this study will sufficiently provide a starting point for further discussion for and executing a textbook design that will help enhance our students' communication ability.

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