

"Developing communicative competence through focus-on-form instruction in a Japanese middle school."

Context

- Level: Middle School 1st year.
- Class size: 34 students
- Text: *New Horizon 1*. Tokyo Shoseki

Goals

- Develop the students' grammatical competence through structured input and output drills (Lee and VanPatten, 2003) developed from common communication games and TPR
- Develop the students' sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence through regular conversation strategy practice sessions.
- Integrate and develop the students' overall communicative competence through information exchange tasks. (Lee and VanPatten, 2003)
- Conduct communication tests based on the information exchange tasks.

What I did

I did three information exchange tasked based lessons one, each term. The final session for each of these lessons was a communication test based on the information exchange task. Students had to exchange information in a timed conversation and then write a paragraph based on that information. In the first two terms the timed conversations were two-minutes however this was reduced to 1:45 seconds for the test due to the need to finish in one class session. For the final communication test I increased the time to 5 minutes and recorded the test on video for later review. The tasks were scaffolded with the following over multiple class sessions.

- TPR adapted to function as structured input.
- Communication games based on games commonly played with ALTs and adapted to follow the guidelines of structured input and output (Lee and VanPatten, 2003)
- Other structured input and output drills.
- Recursive, short conversations for conversation strategy practice. This was done at the beginning and or end of most class sessions.
- Composition writing activities.
- Timed-conversations with composition writing to integrate all the proficiencies practiced and prepare for the test.

What happened

In this section I list observations of what happened in class based on data collected from class observations, recordings of student activities, student writing samples, and a student survey. I begin with general observations of how the students learned based on all data sources, and then present data on the students' grammatical competence based on language samples, general communicative competence based on the test data, and finally the student survey data. Please note that names referring to students in the data have been changed to protect their privacy.

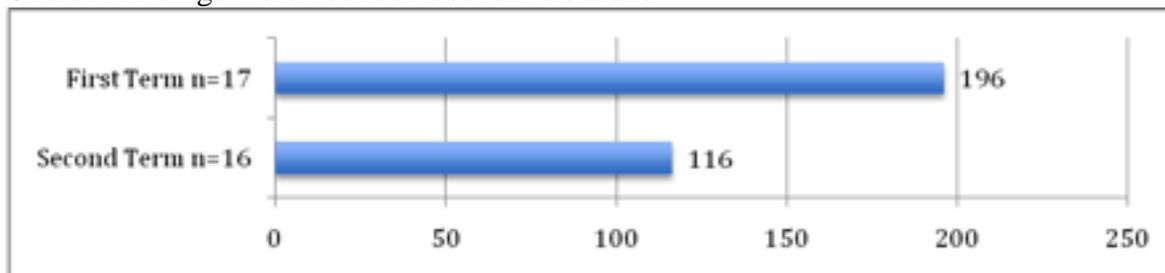
General observations

- One student, whom I call Junichiro, learned everything very slowly. He was unable to attend to as much at one time as the other students, so when working on a new proficiency he often neglected those he had already mastered. In the first term he was able to do everything on the test and only made one error, but was not able to do the communication test in the

second term. In the third term he was able to participate in the communication test with a lot of help from his partner.

- Other students showed a similar pattern to Junichiro but mastered proficiencies faster.
- In the second term scheduling problems caused there to be several hiatuses including a one-month hiatus. After the one-month hiatus I noticed that I did not hear students use plurals with the verb like.
- The students seemed to struggle and spoke much more slowly in the second term test . I confirmed this by making a word count of their conversations. The students spoke much fewer words in the second term test that the first. (see chart 1)

Chart 1: Average word count of test conversations



- In the third term test the students spoke fairly fluently for the whole 5 minutes.
- In the third communication test the students were able to ask and answer a variety of questions and many used a variety of conversation strategies. However the question forms were often not accurate.

Forms and errors

In order to understand how the structured input and output drills and communication effected the students' grammatical competence I collected data on their production of a number of forms, first person positive and negative, the collocation of play and do, plural forms used with the verb like, and third person subject verb agreement.

- First person singular positive and negative forms: Over the course of the term, students made a number of errors in first person positive and negative verb forms. Generally these errors did not recur in subsequent language samples and were absent from the test except for juniors slip by Junichiro. (see table 1)

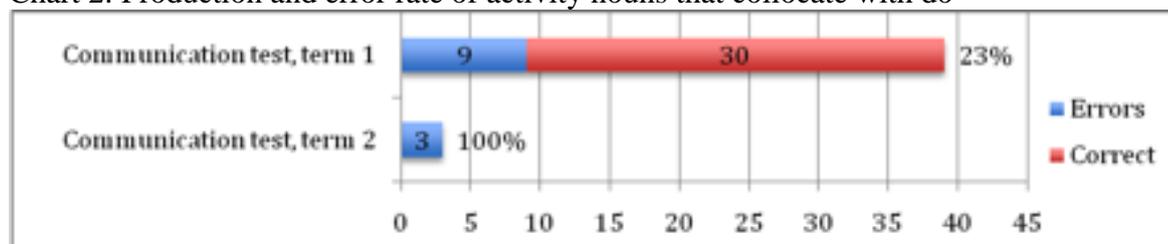
Table 1: Errors in first person singular verb forms (bold) and correct production of corresponding forms.

	June 14 Recursive short conversations and the Who Am I? Composition	June 28 Timed conversations and compositions.	July 5 Communication test Test
Koichi	I 'm do snowboarding. I 'm don't play golf.		I play baseball I play badminton I play 卓球.
Tomoki	I 'm don't like NAME	I don't like study. I don't like basketball.	I don't like 焼肉.

	June 14 Recursive short conversations and the Who Am I? Composition	June 28 Timed conversations and compositions.	July 5 Communication test Test
Momoka	I'm play SKE I'm play too AKB.	I play soccer. I play swimming. I play shogi.	I play badminton. I play volleyball. I don't play dance.
Nobita	I am from ドラムオウコク I am チョッパー	I NAME (5)	I'm NAME.
Hiroshi		I want like AKB goods. (5) Do you want like AKB goods? (5)	I want AKB goods Do you want AKB goods?
Junichiro	In response to do-fronted questions. "Yes, I am " (2)	In response to do-fronted questions "Yes, I am " (9) "Yes, I do" (1)	In response to do-fronted questions "Yes, I do." (2) "Yes, I am ." (1)

- Play vs. do: As I expected some students talked about activities such as swimming or judo that collocate with do rather than play. (see chart 2) It should be noted that none of the students who produced these words on the first communication test produced it on the second.

Chart 2: Production and error rate of activity nouns that collocate with do



- One student, whom I have named Kana, changed her production in the course of the communication-focused activities. In the strategy practice following the structured input she produced an incorrect collocation but later produced correct collocations after hearing her classmates correct collocations (Table 00)

Table 2: Kana's production verbs collocated with activity nouns.

Language Sample	Kana's production	Her partners' production.
6/14 Recursive short conversations	play swimming	×
6/28 Timed-conversations	×	do swimming
6/28 Timed-conversation compositions	do swimming	Na
7/5 Test-conversation	do swimming	do dance
7/5 Test-composition.	do dance, do swimming	Na

- Plural form: In the first term many students used singular nouns for direct objects of the verbs like, and read. (see chart 3) In the second term after structured input some students produced the correct form. (see table 3) However in subsequent conversations they did not while others did. (see table 4) .

Chart 3: Production and error rate of noun forms with the verb like with plural expected

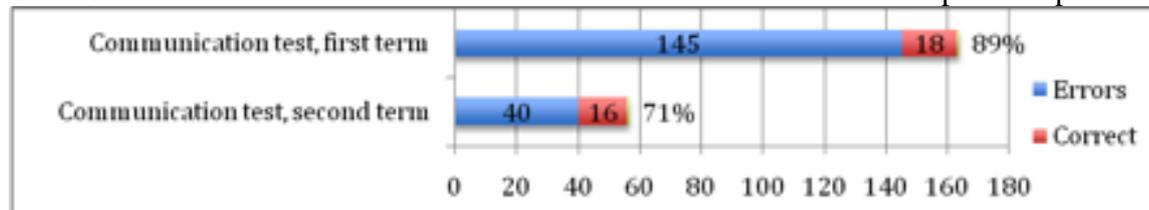


Table 3: Students who produced plural nouns with the verb like after the structured input but not on the test. NO indicates “No output.”

Student	Communication test, term one.	Strategy practice, September 15	Strategy practice, September 27	Communication test, term two
Konan	Lego	NO	Legos (4)	animal
Noriko	cat, dog	cats	cat	bird
Yuna	carrot, dog, book, cherry, comics, cat, watermelon	books	books	dog, cat, hamburger
Irusa	strawberry, lemon (2), cherry, cookie, orange	strawberries	strawberry	tiger, monkey

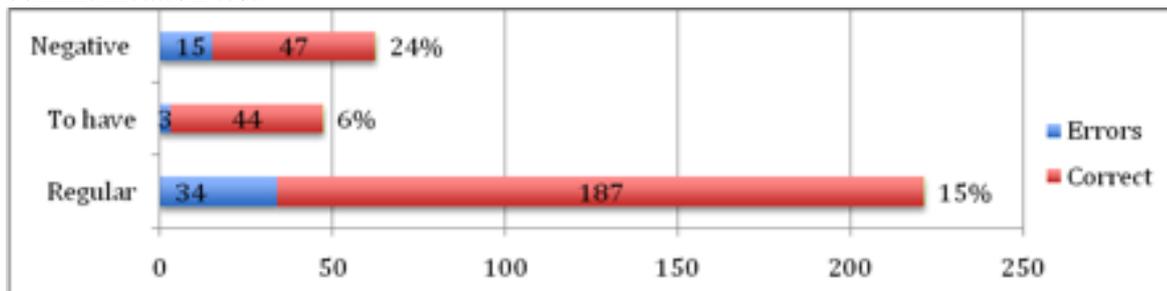
Table 4: Students who produced plural nouns with the verb like in the term two communication test.

“NO” indicates “No output”, “ND” indicates “No data.”

Student	7/5 Communication test, term one.	9/15 short conversations	9/27 Strategy practice	11/28 Communication test, term two
Miki	cherry, apple, strawberry (2)	ND	ND	animals
Daisuke	Orange	ND	ND	dogs (2), hamburgers, tiger (2)
Miko	cherry, orange (2)	ND	ND	hotdogs, dogs (2), noodles
Hiroshi	carrot, onion (2), lemon	NO	onion (4)	birds
Hana	strawberry, cookie, cookies	ND	ND	dogs, rabbits, hamburger, lion
Kana	cat, strawberry	ND	tomato	dogs (2), hamburger

- Third person subject verb agreement: The students did one structured input activity on third person subject verb agreement. The activity did not include input of either negative forms or the irregular verb to have. Subsequently in the communication test the students’ error rates were highest for the negative form and lowest for the verb to have. (see chart 4)

Chart 4: Third person subject verb agreement production and error rates in the 2nd term communication test.



Student Survey

I gave the students two surveys one at the end of the fall term in December, and the second in March at the end of the winter term. In the December survey I asked the students to compare their recollections of April to their current state. In the March survey I asked the same questions about their then current feelings. In addition I added some new questions in which I asked them to compare the present to April.

n=34

Chart 5: 2分間会話するとき...

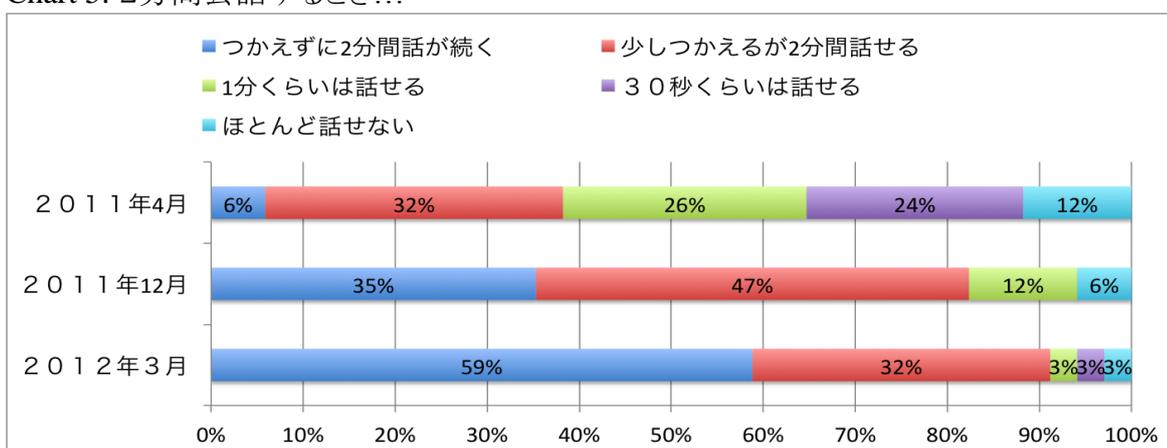


Chart 6: 会話するとき...

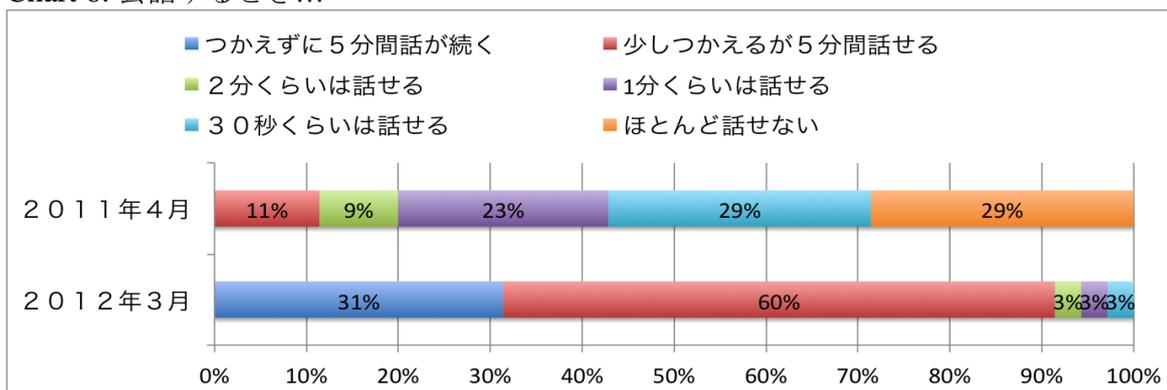


Chart 7: 授業でこの会話方法を練習しました。

- 初めてのあいさつ
- 「nice to see you」のあいさつ
- 別れのあいさつ
- 自分のことを言って、パートナーのことについて聞きます
- 「How about ___?」使って質問する
- 「who, what, where, when」につえて質問する
- shadowing
- 「pardon」

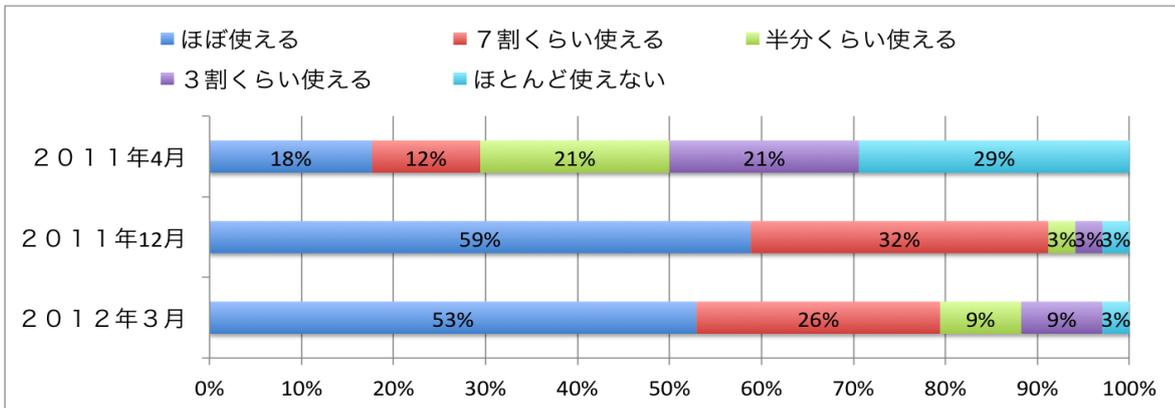


Chart 8: 授業でこの会話方法を練習しました。

- 「who, what, where, when」について質問する
 - shadowing
 - 「pardon」
- この会話方法が会話に...

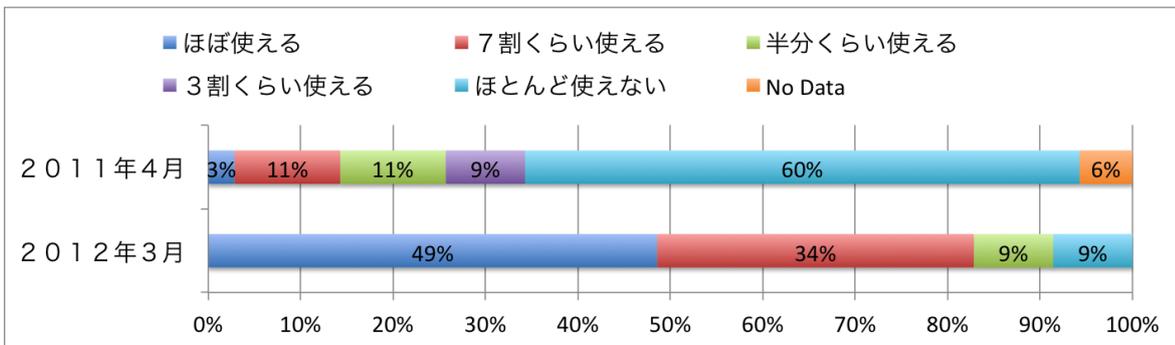


Chart 9: ペアで話した内容が...

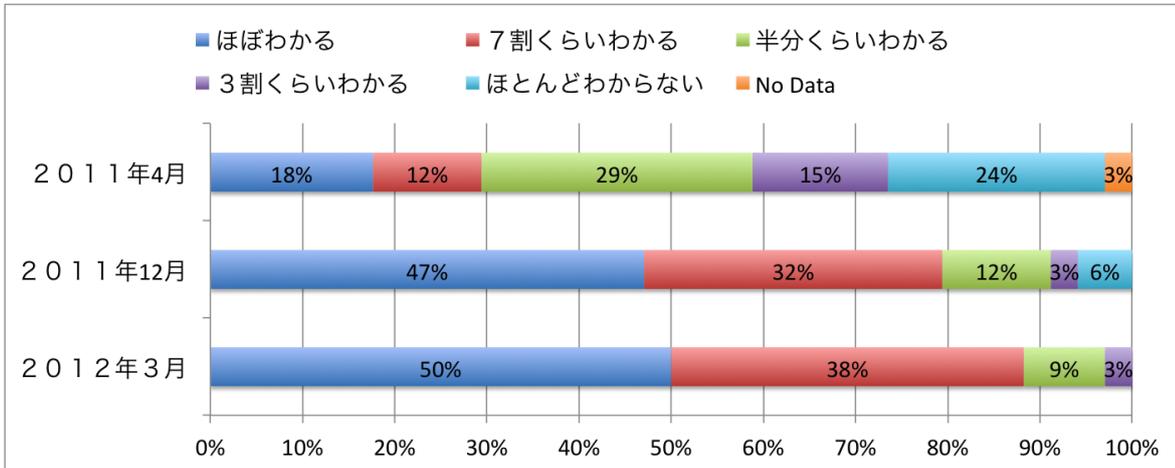


Chart 10: 8つ以上のまとまりのある作文が...

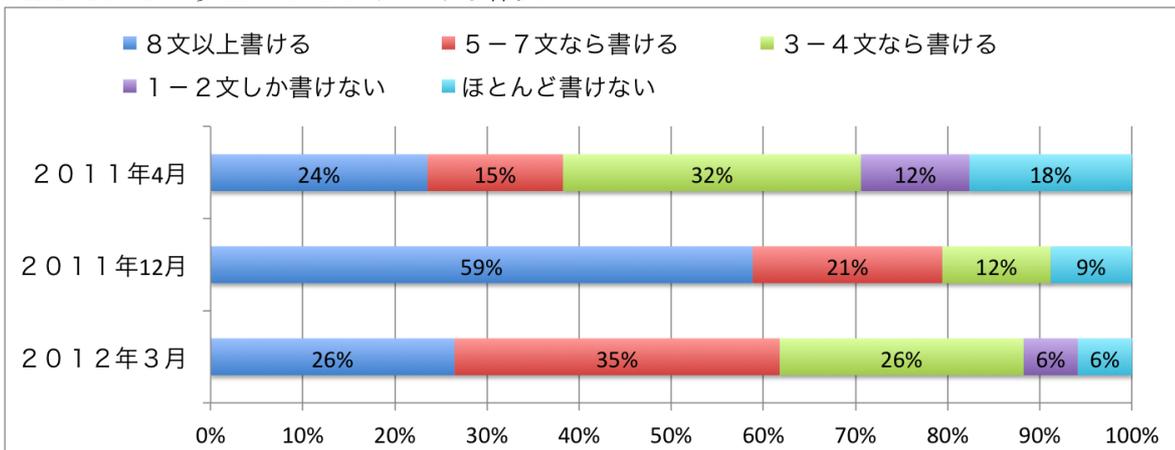


Chart 11: レクター先生の授業は分かりますか。

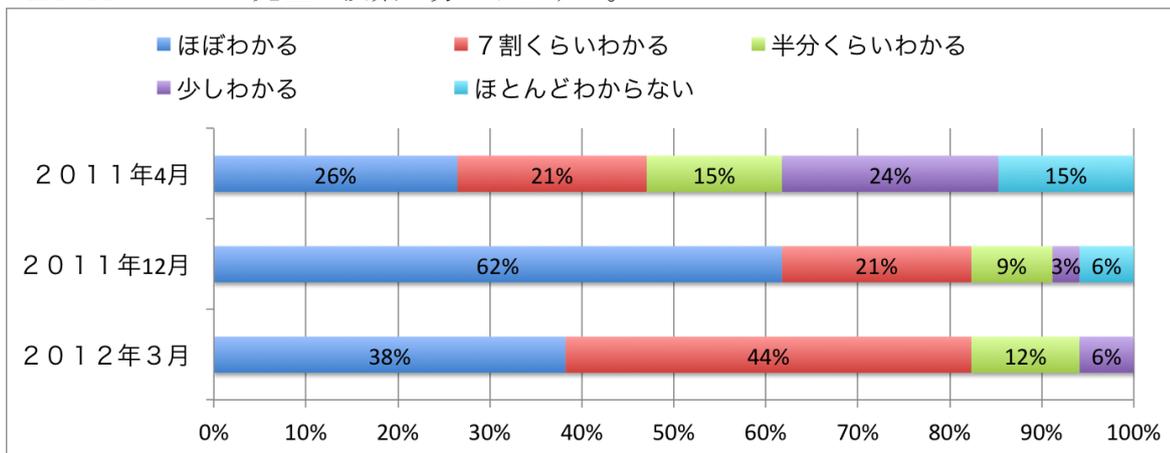


Chart 12: レクター先生の授業は楽しいです

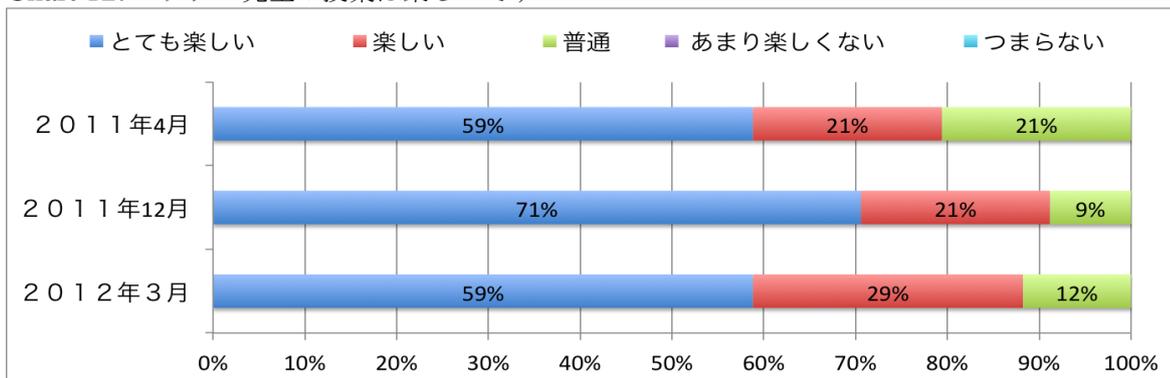


Chart 13: 英語を頑張って勉強する気が

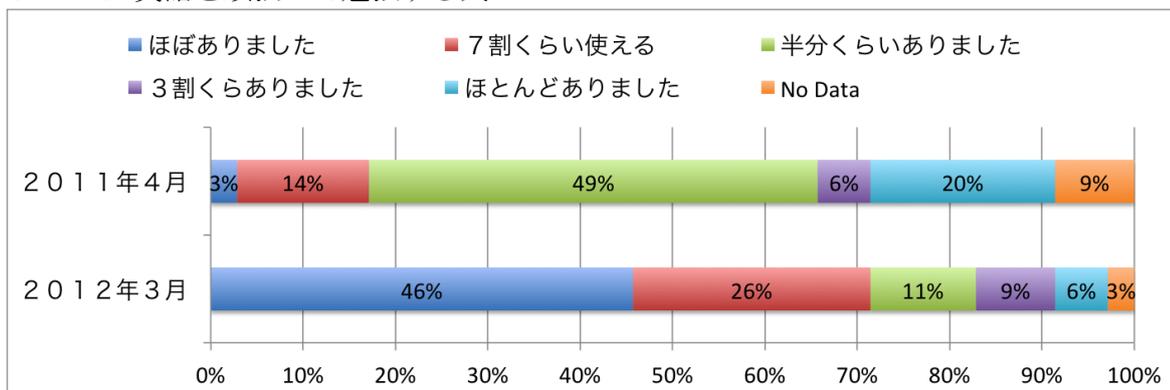


Chart 14: レクター先生の授業で頑張る気が

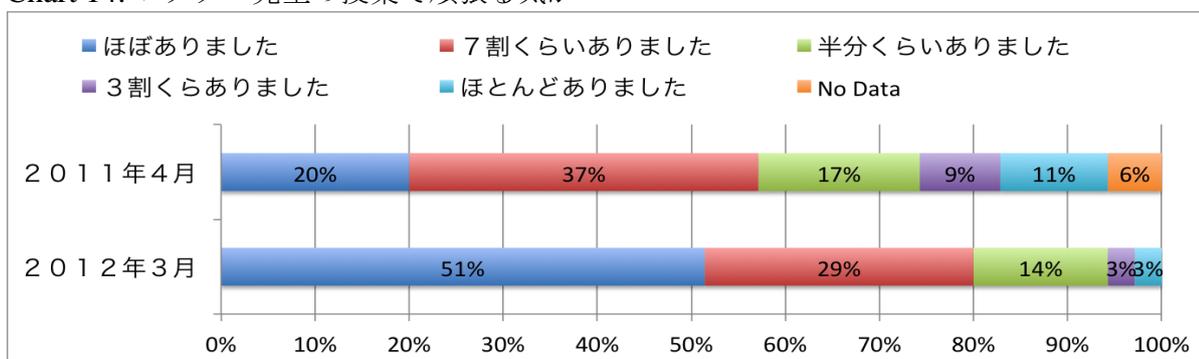


Chart 15: 英語が好きですか。

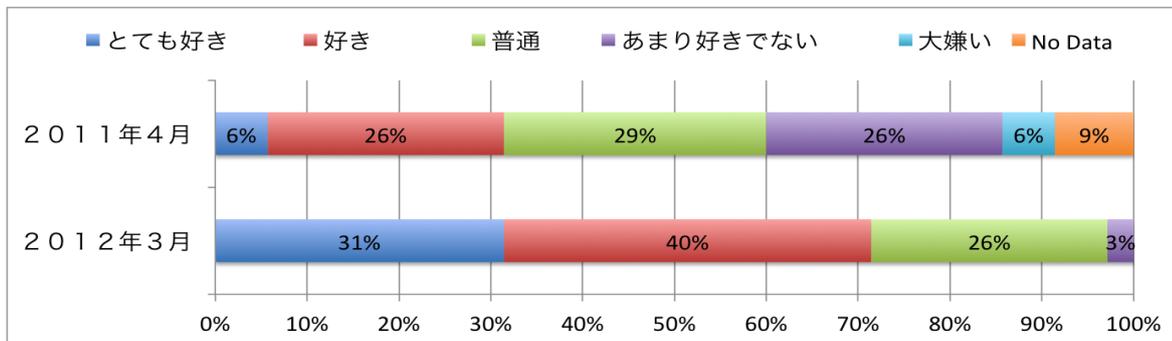
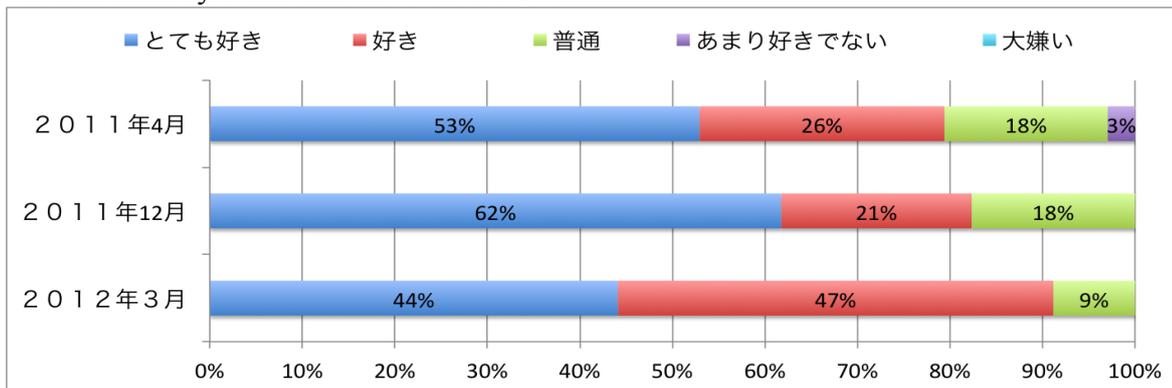


Chart 16 : Do you like Mr. Rector's class?



- Reasons for motivation and liking English

In response to one or more questions students gave the following reasons for being motivated or being more motivated

- 19 students wrote that having improved their English ability or otherwise succeeded in class was a reason for being motivated to persevere in English (10), being motivated in my lessons (9), liking English (11)
英語を話せるようになりたかったからです。
- 17 students wrote that English or the class being fun was a reason for:, being motivated to persevere in English (7), being motivated in my lessons (12), Liking English (7)
レクター先生の授業が楽しかったので頑張る気がありました！！
- Seven students wrote that in class games were a reason for being motivated to persevere in English (1), being motivated in my lessons (5), liking English (2)
Simon Says game など英語を作ったゲームあったので頑張る気が UPUP.
- Five students wrote that enjoying speaking was a reason for, being motivated to persevere in English (2), being motivated in my lessons (3), liking English (1)
英語を話すことが楽しいからです。
- Five students wrote that English was challenging as a reason for being motivated to persevere in English (4) liking English (1)
4月に想像したよりもむずかしかったのでちゃんと授業についていけるように勉強した。
- Four students wrote that English is useful as a reason for liking English (4)
- Three students wrote that the chance to study with a foreign teacher was a reason for being motivated in Mr. Rector's lessons. (3)
外国人の先生とあまり交流する機会がないので、レクター先生の授業で頑張る気があった。
- Two students wrote that Mr. Rector created a positive atmosphere as a reason form being motivated in my classes (1) and liking English (1)
分からない所があってレクター先生に聞くとても優しく教えてくれたり、いつも最初のあいさつで元気よく言ってくれるので、この1時間頑張ろうといつも思えました。

- One student wrote that Mr. Rector's class had a game like atmosphere as reason for strong motivation in class. (1) ゲーム感覚の授業だったから。
- Other positive reasons (5)
- Students gave the following reasons for low or decreasing motivation or for liking English less.
 - Five students wrote that not understanding the class or failure on tests was a reason for low or decreasing motivation to persevere in English (3), disliking English or liking it less. (3)
分からない事があるので勉強する気が少なくなります。
解き方などが分かるとうれしけどテストとかで悪いとやる気をなくす。
 - Four students wrote that English or the class being difficult was a reason for low or decreasing motivation to persevere in English (3), liking English less than in April (2)
最初は、簡単だったので好きだったけど段々難しくなってきたから。
 - One student wrote that he or she did not like talking with other people and this was a reason for low motivation in my class (1).
人と話すのがいやなので
 - Other reasons (4)
- How was my class?
 - Games were fun or I enjoyed the class because of games (14).
色々なゲームをして、楽しみながら、英語がわかって良かった。
 - The class was fun. (games not specified) (7)
楽しかった。
 - Speaking English in class were good or fun. (5)
普通の授業の時よりたくさん英語が話せて良かった。
 - The class was easy to understand (5).
楽しくて分かりやすくよかった。
 - My English improved so the class was good or fun or I was happy (4).
コミュニケーションがとれるようになってうれしい。
 - Mr. Rector created a positive atmosphere. (4)
クター先生が一所懸命授業をやってくれるので毎回楽しかったです。
 - Mr. Rector scaffolded the activities effectively. (2)
1つ1つことに楽しくやってくれているので楽しんで出来る。
 - The class had a game like atmosphere (1)
ゲーム感覚でできるものも多くあり、よいと思います。
 - Other positive comments (3)
 - Other negative comments (3)

What I learned

How do the lessons effect the students learning?

- Structured input drills seem to be effective at enabling students to use forms in subsequent structured output or communication focused activities.
- Short treatments of structured input do not necessarily lead to accurate production or generalization of a form. It was common for students to consistently produce correct forms with one word and incorrect forms with another. More input and possibly spaced repetition may be required before learners generalize forms.
- Short treatments of structured input may not be durable if the learners do not encounter the form later. Several students produced plural forms as objects of the verb like in the first couple of weeks after the structured input but did not do so after the one-month hiatus.

- Learners may acquire some forms more easily than others. The students seemed to be more successful with simple forms such as subject verb agreement and negative forms than they were with forms that are related to subtle differences in meaning such as the "do" collocation and when to use a plural form with like. (See charts 2, 3, and 4)
- Learners may learn improve their accuracy with forms if they encounter and use the forms frequently in communication-focused activities after structured input. In the first term the errors in the frequently used forms all but disappeared. (See table 1) Also in the second term the error rates for subject verb agreement were much lower than for plural nouns.
- Learners learn the conversation strategies they practice in strategy-focused activities and they may develop additional discourse strategies on their own. Students in this study used some discourse strategies in the test that I did not teach them.
- Learners can develop the listening, speaking, and writing abilities through these activities as demonstrated by their success on the communication test and the survey data.
- Learners develop the ability to participate in open-ended conversation for 5 or more minutes.

What I learned about how to develop learners' communicative competence through focus-on-form with information exchange tasks.

- As Lee and VanPatten (2003) suggest, learners benefit from focusing on proficiencies in separate activities before integrating them in the information exchange task.
- Reviewing all proficiencies repeatedly helps students improve accuracy and fluency and allows them to integrate proficiencies.
- Slow learners may require more repetition of proficiencies before they can integrate them in open-ended activities.
- Working in groups rather than in teacher-fronted activities may help students stay focused.
- By defining goals carefully and give students credit for using language creatively, using forms that were not part of focus on form activities, and for using additional strategies the teacher can help keep the focus on meaning and encourage learners to use more language.

How does the approach effect the students' motivation to persevere in class.

- Overall the lessons contributed to maintaining and improving students motivation to participate in English class and their liking of English.
- The success the students had contributed to high level of participation. This is shown by 19 of 34 students giving having improved as a reason for being motivated or liking English and by others giving failure as a reason for low motivation or disliking English.
- The class being fun contributed to the high level of motivation. This is shown by 15 students giving the class being fun as a reason for their motivation to study and their liking of English.
- Communication games, communicating with their classmates in English, and the students' success contributed to the class being fun and by extension to the high levels of students liking English.

Information-exchange-task timed-conversation practice lesson plan

Context

- First year middle school

Goals

- The students exchange information in timed conversations and then write a paragraph about their conversation partners based on a topic decided beforehand.

Materials

- Conversation cards (the students make these for homework or in a previous lesson.)
- Worksheet.
- Timer

Procedure

- The students review and add to their conversations cards for a few minutes.
- If this is the first time the teacher may wish to do a demonstration conversation with an assistant.
- Before the timed conversations start decide on a procedure for changing partners. This procedure should be familiar to the students so that they can change partners quickly and smoothly.
- The students make pairs.
- The teacher starts the timer.
- The students converse until the allotted time is finished.
- The students write notes about their conversation in the space provided on the worksheet. They may use their first language for this.
- The students complete the self-evaluation (See worksheet). This helps to remind them of the evaluation criteria and goals.
- The students change partners and repeat the procedure as many times as time allows.
- In the last 15 minutes of class the students write a paragraph about one of their partners in the space provided on the worksheet. If they have time they may wish to write more than one to get as much practice as possible.

