

NUFS Workshop 2017

Newsletter No. 5

Workshop in September

Date: September 9, 2017, 10:30-14:30

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

Presenter: Joseph Falout (Nihon University)

Title: “Switching the Script: Turn around Ten Teaching Preconceptions”



Abstract: We teachers have a lot of preconceptions. Where do they come from? Preconceptions come from our scripts. Scripts are the stories by which we teach and live. They are narratives created by us and our social worlds that explain about who we all are, and what we are doing. Many times these scripts are beneficial to our teaching, as they can be built upon years of experience and wisdom. Other times, they can ironically misinform, hamper, and even harm our teaching. This workshop explores ten scripts that may be misleading teachers against their intentions to teach to the best of their abilities. Then we will discuss and practice ways for switching these scripts for ourselves and our students.

The number of participants: 33

1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- Ideal classmates prompts – I’d like to share the ideas and image of how to learn together and help each other. Especially drawing is the good idea for my students to visualize the collaborative class. Students also need to switch their scripts.
- Asking quick questions in two minutes – I think I can use it for my students to improve speaking skill.
- Guess the picture goal – students tend to be afraid of making mistakes and they think making mistakes is bad. People can’t learn without making mistakes. This activity can make class very comfortable with mistakes.
- For me, anything dealing with how to organize the class and get students into groups is great. I often teach large classes, so getting them into smaller groups might help me.
- I want to use ‘Making many questions’ game. Most students feel hard to make follow-up questions. I think it is a good chance to practice making questions to make their conversation more natural.



- Lots of great student-centered material – the methods of organizing classrooms and creating work groups/pairs will help with larger classroom management.

2. What you learned from today’s workshop

- I learned to doubt what I’ve been believing right. I would like to reconsider if it’s really good for my students and what’s really right for students.
- I found the section about data collection from student for students very interesting and had not really thought about in too much detail. Eye-opening! Great info to apply in my own teaching + research.
- I found that I’m still stuck on old idea for teaching. I need to rethink about ‘what do I teach?’ and ‘what’s the purpose of teaching?’ I need to switch my image or idea of teaching.
- I have learned how I should switch my script. I also learned very practical, effective activities to develop learner’s language skills.
- I learned that it is important to tell students that it is all right or inevitable to make mistakes in class. Many students hesitate to try new sentence structure or new words. It will be great I could tell them about it through my lessons.
- It was a great challenge to some of my pre-concerned ideas about teaching that I’ve accumulated over my many years teaching in Japan.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): I’m teaching grammar in English Expressions class in high school. Students’ understanding is rather low. I want to know the teaching way which covers grammar learning and speaking activities at the same time.

A: Focused tasks are a great way to get grammatical forms and lexical chunks learned properly while engaging in conversational meaning-making. Practicing conversations that focus students’ attention to specific grammatical forms helps to proceduralize or automatize grammar rules (Ellis, 2003), especially when the forms are recycled during the same lesson and across different lessons. Automaticity means that when students hear something or need to speak it, they won’t need to pull up the grammar rule or make a translation in their head. Rather, meaning and form become woven together in automatic receptive and productive skills, resulting in correct comprehension when heard in context and accurate production when called upon.

Here is a simplified illustration. Students can be rotating in pairs with the communicative goal of finding out how many things they have in common. During this communicative task, they may be given the following form to focus upon: “What movie do you like?” “What sport do you like?” “What animal do you like?” After practicing this task and perhaps other communicative tasks with the same form embedded within or integral to the newer tasks, the students may become able to monitor themselves and even their classmates as to whether or not the form was produced accurately. Ideally, they will eventually

progress to a stage in which they can use the form automatically and generatively. For example, when traveling abroad for the summer they may turn to someone standing next to them in line for ice cream and without any rehearsal ask, “What flavor do you like?”

Also, instead of the teacher teaching the grammar, how about flipping the script? Begin by asking students in small groups to look at several examples of the form (i.e., several English expressions using the same form) and figure out their own grammatical use or grammar rule for themselves. Then have the groups teach their grammar rule to the class. Ellis (2003) calls these kinds of activities consciousness raising tasks. For your high school students to accomplish a consciousness raising task, they may need to use their first language (L1). Therefore such tasks may not be appropriate for classes whose learning objectives mainly involve communicative activities through the second language (L2), unless the students do have the ability to complete these tasks in their L2 or the teacher is willing to allow some use of the L1 for this purpose.

Q (2): Do you think pointing grammatical mistakes out to the students is so important in conversation classes?

Before thinking about correcting your students, there are a couple of questions worth asking yourself: “Do I want my students to focus on their grammatical mistakes, or do I want them to be communicating successfully and happily?” and “Will my students learn more from my one-point correction that stops them mid-sentence, or from their lifelong love of English?”

Correct grammar usage and communicative competence may not necessarily be separate things, some teachers might rightly argue, but they can be. Similarly, correct grammar usage and sense of achievement might not be mutually exclusive and could even be quite complementary—especially for English teachers. But most students will not become English teachers. They will grow up and turn out to either like English and continue learning, or dislike English and stop learning. I hope students grow up having a strong passion—as strong as their English teachers have—to communicate and relate with others.



Despite these sentiments, I confess my dismay at hearing my own university students frequently asking each other different questions that present this same ungrammatical pattern: “What do you like movie?” “What do you like sport?” and “What do you like animal?” However, even when my conversation classes are running well, with a roomful of students fully on-task and engaged in lively discussions using English, there are only a limited number of grammatical mistakes that I can possibly catch. And only a fraction of those are what I can attend to in the moment. What to do? Make corrections after their conversations have finished? No. It will be too late for them to remember what they had said and too difficult for me to have compiled everything that I had heard. So before deciding to point out a grammatical mistake, I mentally make split-second answers to a barrage of questions:

- Was the communicative intent conveyed? Was enough meaning made? Was the interlocutor hampered by the mistake? If so, to what degree?
- Is it a common error with other students? How does this error compare to the other errors? Is it an error that will likely be repeated by the same individual? Will the error likely spread across the classroom with more students reproducing it during this lesson? How about next week? Throughout the semester?
- What is the chance the error will fossilize? Or is it already fossilized?
- What is the specific learning objective of the present task or communicative exchange? What is the overall objective of today's lesson? To what degree is the error integral to the task? Does the error fail to follow a grammatical form featured in the present task or lesson? In another lesson from before or after this one?
- Will the student who made the error understand what I mean if I try to point out the error? Should I simply give the correct form or start by first pointing out the mistake? How to point it out? Will the other students involved in the conversation understand the error as such and my attempt to correct it?
- Will pointing out the error lead to immediate uptake (i.e., the speaker correcting the error on the spot)? Will the student likely use the correct form next chance or revert back to using the error? What are the chances that the uptake will last? How many more times will I need to point out the same error to the same student before the correct form will stick?
- Will pointing out the error interrupt the conversation? How much of an interruption of the interdependent though processes of the students? How deep are they into conversation? How flexible is their thinking? How able are they to do multi-tasking, simultaneously attending to the form of the words and the meaning they are making, correct the form, and carry on with the conversation?
- Will pointing out the error negatively influence the student's self-confidence? Will the student lose face? Will the chance to correct the mistake be motivating? Will the experience cause self-blame and demotivation (Falout & Maruyama, 2004)? Will the student get anxious and flustered and fall into a cycle of failures? How else might the student react? How about the reactions of the student's classmates and friends? Will they laugh or be supportive? How will they feel about themselves? How to point out the mistake and keep the social atmosphere positive?
- Does the student want errors pointed out? Even if the student asks for errors to be pointed out, can the student really take it? (Some students cannot)
- Will I have enough time and energy and mental focus to attend to other things at hand, such as something else needing attention during the conversational exchange (e.g., classroom management and on-task monitoring, the physical safety of students rotating around the room, the



quality and amount of task accomplished, etc.), and how much time is left before moving on to the next stage of the lesson?

- Should I interrupt the conversation now or wait just a few more seconds for the students to finish their ideas? When is the timing right to make the correction? Is it too late? Have I thought too much and waited too long to point out the mistake?

Consider two approaches that flip the script on error correction. One is appreciative feedback (Falout, 2016), which means pointing out what works rather than what does not. Specifically pointing out and praising use of correct grammatical forms and good communication strategies promotes more of the same, fosters self-confidence, and makes a positive experience for teacher and students. The other approach is editing conferences (Falout, 2008). This means setting aside some face-to-face time with students to correct their written errors with a friendly smile and more personal care than with slaps of red ink that covers their hard efforts on the page and highlights their mistakes.

In the end, whether or not teachers of conversation classes find correcting errors to be important, the job of pointing out student errors is certainly complex and difficult and requires sensitivity. Consequences of corrections may weigh heavily upon their learning. Do tread with prudence.

Q (3): Are there any other activities for getting students to ask the questions instead of being 'spoon fed' information by their teachers?

Try getting students into the habit of following up answers to closed-ended questions with open-ended questions for instilling curiosity, encouraging critical thinking, and continuing the conversation. Here are some example closed-ended questions: “What movie do you like?” “What sport do you like?” “What animal do you like?” Any answer to each of these closed-ended questions can be followed by any of these open-ended questions: “Could you describe _____?” “Could you tell me more about _____?” “Why do you like _____?” “What is the best part about _____?” “What is fun about _____?”

Simply asking “Why?” is an easy open-ended question to make. My students become habitual with tacking on the question “Why?” to what they hear from their conversation partners. Also, I encourage them to ask me “Why?” every time I try to get some teaching point across. Here is another flipping of the script: How about the teacher asking the students why they are doing a learning activity? At any stage of an activity—before, during, and after—students can be stopped by the teacher to ask each other about what they are doing in the activity, how they are doing it, and why. Answering these questions together helps students to externalize their thinking and internalize their learning (Falout, 2011).

Saying farewell for now, I would like to thank everyone in this NUFS workshop for readily speaking out to contribute useful ideas, for collaborating in seamless coordination to



make the group activities successful and discussions fruitful, and for sharing your wonderful curiosities and questions. Keep asking yourselves: “Where do my teaching scripts come from?” “Are these scripts effective?” and “Is it worth trying different scripts?”

References

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Action Research Session

Date: September 9, 2017, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 32, Room 41, Room 51

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato (NUFS), Nancy Mutoh

The number of participants: 20



Next Workshop (scheduled)

Date: October 14, 2017, 10:30-14:30, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Room 31

Presenter: Sean Reid (Teikyo-kani Elementary school)

Title: “Fostering Young Learners’ Communicative Competence: Techniques, Strategies and Activities”