

Online NUFS Workshop 2021

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in May

Date: May 8, 2021 9:00-12:15 (Zoom Meeting)

Presenter: Satsuki McNeill (English Conversation School)

“Developing Third-Age Learners’ Speaking Skills with Communication Strategies and Timed Conversation”

Abstract:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is now at the forefront of second language teaching in order to help students develop their communicative competence (CC), but is this true for learners of all ages? In this workshop, the presenter will relate their experiences in teaching their classes for mature learners. These older students were introduced to a CLT approach that focused on timed conversations and communication strategies in order to develop their CC, especially speaking skills. This workshop will invite the audience to participate in demonstrations of how to teach English to adult older learners based on CLT. Furthermore, the presenter will report the results of their action research projects.



Presenter: Takayuki Fujimoto (Iwakura Sogo High School)

“Developing High School Students’ Motivation through Focus-on-Form Instruction and Performance Tests”

Abstract:

How to teach English grammar clearly has been discussed among English teachers in Japan. However, according to Lee & VanPatten (2003), “traditional instruction consisting of drills in which learner output is manipulated and the instruction is divorced from meaning or communication is not an effective method for enhancing language acquisition” (p.137). Students who have explicit explanations and drill-like practices cannot acquire the target language. It is not easy to attend both meaning and form at the same time, especially for beginners. To solve these problems, Ellis (2015) proposed a focus-on-form. I will share what is the focus-on-form and how my students developed their motivation through this communicative grammar instruction.



The number of participants: 51

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

(Satsuki)

- Conversation activities with step by step are interesting and useful in my class, too. I am in charge of Grade 1 students in a junior high school, and the level is not so high, so those activities should be effective.
- Communicative conversation practices repeating the same contents will help students internalize phrases often used in a small talk.
- Each activities lead to fluent conversation in the end. They were really effective on helping students have more confidence. Many students seem like they don't handle some communication strategies. Introducing each CSs facilitates students' speaking smoothly.
- Her lecture tells me the easy and fun way to try conversation activities during English class. Conversation strategies seem to be simple but for students they are very difficult. My students don't have good idea for continuing conversation, these ideas are very helpful. I hope my students will enjoy their conversation by using these strategies.
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- I want to use Communication Strategies step by step. It is because I can enjoy talking and I am sure that students will enjoy talking in English. Actually, I have already introduced it step by step. However, I realized I still need to think if the step is too fast or not. Since I experienced her way during the workshop, I realized I still have a room for improvement to teach communication strategies.
- I want to use Conversation strategies in my class because many of the students don't know how to continue conversation due to lack of expressions such as openers, closers, shadowing, asking again and so on. If they knew the strategies, it would be much easier to talk in the class.

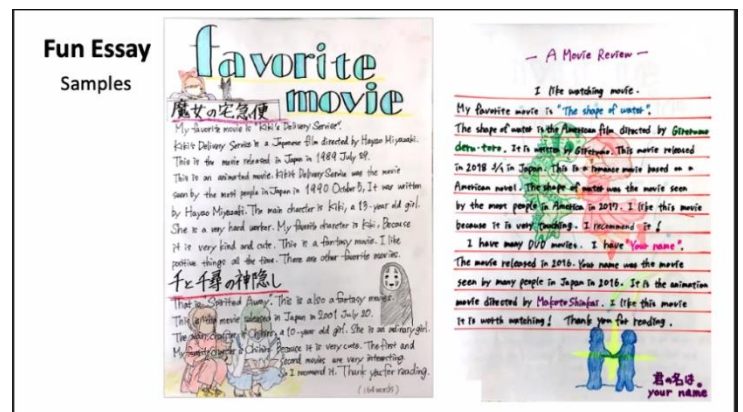


(Takayuki)

- I thought small talk was difficult in my class because the students' English level was too low, but I changed my mind. I will try small talk with some helps which Takayuki showed us. That should work in my class, and I hope that makes my students' motivation higher.
- Almost everything. I was able to see what he did, what worked in his class, and some things to be mindful of. The activities like mind map and free writing are just some of what I planned to do this year.
- He also introduces CSs as Satsuki did. Therefore, it's necessary to improve speaking ability. And, talking in pair work facilitates how they need to use grammar and it certainly leads to grammar

acquisition. Peer editing was also great to learn grammatical mistakes with each other.

- I really understand what he thought and what he did for the students. I also teach at the same kind of school as Takayuki. Most of my students don't like English and don't have motivation to study. So, every idea he showed today is very interesting and has good meanings. Drill practices are, of course, important for beginners, but if they don't think by themselves when doing practices and activities, they can't acquire anything. His activities have a lot to think about. I would like to try many activities.
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- I want to use small talk cards. It will be quite useful because students can choose the topic by themselves. It will be also useful for making follow-up questions. I also like the way of using drills. I realized that if we, teachers change them a little bit in a communicative way, students can talk about the sentences.
- I want to use Focus on Form when I introduce grammar activities because I tend to teach my students grammar just like "This is something named something and this part shows something". However, it's not interesting even to me, and I was thinking to teach better so that the students can use target grammar in their speaking or writing.



2. What you learned from today's workshop

(Satsuki)

- In my class, I tried small talk at the beginning, but the students don't have ideas or patterns for continuing conversation. Some skills such as conversation strategies are very helpful for learners. Also, to make activities more active, 5-time recursive practice with different partners is important.
- In my class, I tried small talk at the beginning, but the students don't have ideas or patterns for continuing conversation. Some skills such as conversation strategies are very helpful for learners. Also, to make activities more active, 5-time recursive practice with different partners is important.
- I learned practicing makes perfect. If we talk about the same topic for five times in different pairs, we can focus on the contents little by little.
- I found the effects of 5-time recursive practice particularly interesting because sometimes I face some difficulties managing it in my classes with younger students. One reason is that there are many other things to cover, but another reason is that students often lose interests and start showing less focus if they are asked to do the same tasks many times. However, Satsuki's presentation showed some possibility to handle those issues and made me want to try timed-conversations with more effective

ways.

- I learned that if we continue timed conversation, the number of students who can use conversation strategies increased. So, what I need to do is start from the easy level, do the same thing for a few times in each conversation, then move onto the higher level gradually.

7. Showing interest/ Making comments

Oh, really? Oh, yeah? Uh-huh

That's great! I see. That's too bad.

Example

- ▶ A: How was your Golden Week?
- ▶ B: It was great.
- ▶ A: Oh, yeah? What is the best/worst memory of your Golden Week?
- ▶ B: Hmm...Let me see... BBQ with Maki's family at Tokoname.
- ▶ A: Oh, really?
- ▶ B: That's the best memory of my Golden Week.
- ▶ A: That's great!

(Takayuki)

- Drill-like study for studying grammar doesn't lead to acquisition which I didn't know until recently. Therefore focus-on-form is effective to improve students grammar proficiency. In my lessons, I also use this focus-on-form way by letting students notice how they need to use each grammars. Letting them notice each grammars is so fun for them when they try answering some questions in the end.
- I believe that to be good at English, using English as much as possible is quite important. At the last part of his lecture he told us that our English class is the chance for the Japanese student to use English. I think so too.
- I believe that to be good at English, using English as much as possible is quite important. At the last part of his lecture he told us that our English class is the chance for the Japanese student to use English. I think so too.
- I learned the integration of speaking and writing. It looks fun for students to talk about the topic and write about the same topic. I was amazed that the students who were in videos talked naturally.
- I totally agree with Takayuki's comment about classroom as a place to use English. I always try to build rapport between students so that they can feel conformable speaking English with each other. I learned many ideas from his presentations for that today, such as small talk and free writing with interactions.
- When I want to improve students' speaking skills, I need to make opportunities to talk, and especially it is important to talk with conversation strategies. Also, I should show rubric to the students so that they can work on the speaking or writing test eagerly and actively.

3. Questions & Answers

(To Takayuki)

Q (1): Do you think the students tend to pick the same topic? In my experience students tend to pick what is safe or easy topics and avoid the tougher topics which require more vocabulary

--- Yes, I agree with you. When students choose a topic, they choose the topic which they like, or they think it easy. I think this is very important. They might work hard on that topic because they choose the topic by themselves. From the concept of the Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2001), this kind of autonomy is one of the components of intrinsic motivation. Autonomy is related to phenomena such as will, choice, and freedom. On the other hand, I definitely agree that if students

use the only knowledge they have already acquired, they might not improve their ability. In this aspect, teachers should give students semi-control practice. Giving two or three topics might be a good example. In addition, in writing activity, teachers should give them chances to share their writing with three different students. In the classroom, some students try to work hard. When students see the other students engage in the higher level of topic or words, they might feel they also have to or want to try hard. This is called Near peer role models (1995, Murphey).

Q (2): Students in higher proficiency try to express their complicated thoughts even though they often lack proper grammatical knowledge. How do you support higher level students?

--- I am not sure where the students get those difficult words or grammar. If they use their dictionaries, teachers should control them. Some students use a much higher level of language than they actually can use. According to Swain (1985), language learners need not only Comprehensible Input (Krashen, 1982) but Comprehensible Output (Swain, 1985) to acquire the target language. From this point of view, teachers should control students' use of dictionaries or translation apps. To do that, teachers can give them tests such as speed writing or a speaking test. Moreover, if there is a chance to tell them about the vocabulary, we should tell them that 3000 high-frequency words dominate over 95% of our daily English. That means, 3000 words are enough to spend our daily life in English.

Q (3): Students can gradually get grammatical ability. Each works was I'd like to take in as well. Students' vocabularies was increased gradually which mean focus-on-form instruction is effective so much. Students can communicate with their pair and it also leads to let them notice some forms they need to learn.

--- Exactly. As for teaching vocabulary, there are many variations to learn new vocabulary. However, there are three aspects that both teachers and students should pay attention to and focus on. They are *form*, *meaning*, and *use* (Nation, 2001). Students often learn words with repetition or vocabulary tests. However, those are not enough. Teachers should give students a chance to *use* the vocabulary in a communicative context. I think this *use* is a Cinderella of learning vocabulary.

Q (4): Thank you for your wonderful workshop! I think it is a good idea to use famous characters in a controlled practice. Students must be fun. I have a question about examples. When you talked about showing examples with Niwa-san, you said that you need show many examples to let students notice the target grammar. How many sentences/ examples do you prepare for each grammar? I would appreciate if you answer this question.

--- It is up to your students and target grammar. You need to give students as many examples as they can notice meaning and form of the grammar. Although I usually give them around 10 sentences, I

also give them chances to read them, and speak with their partner. I always integrate the language skills of each activity. Here is a guideline for input activities from Lee and VanPatten (2003)

- Present one thing at a time
- Keep meaning focus.
- Move from sentences to connected discourse.
- Use both oral and written input.
- Have the learner do something with the input.
- Keep the learner's processing strategies in mind (p. 154).

Q (5): It seemed that you developed students' writing mostly in the sequence from writing to speaking. For more effective instruction, is it possible that the sequence is to be sometimes reversed from speaking to writing, or recursive depending on the purpose of an activity?

--- Yes. I have both sequences writing to speaking and speaking to writing. Both of them can be effective. I think we should change the order by their goals. If we want them to write more, we should give them speaking first. On the other hand, if their goal is speaking, we can give them writing as brainstorming. And I think teachers should give them opportunities to reflect on the activity. Students might find out what new expressions they use, or what their partner used and what expressions they want to use next time. It takes only a couple of minutes. As I told you in the presentation, students need to notice language form and meaning by themselves.

→[Reflection Work Sheet](#)

To Satsuki

Q (1): Do you think the students get tired of repeating the same sentences? I mean it is a good idea I just wondering if you had some students who did not see the value in it.

--- Students rather enjoy talking many times about the same story, because they exchange the same story differently by changing partners every time. Students get excited when they are able to interact well by utilizing CSs. As I showed in the results, all students agreed that timed conversation was useful to improve English in February as compared to the beginning (April) when two students disagreed. Some students might have thought so in the beginning, but after they experienced it, they changed their belief and attitude towards the approach.

Q (2): Students in higher proficiency try to express their complicated thoughts even though they often lack proper grammatical knowledge. How do you support higher level students?

--- I try to give some feedback orally in class, also on their prep sheets after this activity (after students practice the same topic over two classes). In addition, in the following class, I choose some grammatical common-mistakes from students' performances as well as their prep-sheets. At the same time, students

study the same topic in the textbook, and I try to connect the topic of the timed conversation with the topic in the textbook every time. I include focus on form activities (as Takayuki sensei introduced in his presentation) in order to let students know the grammatical rules so that they are able to achieve uptake of the target forms.

Q (3): I focused on communication strategies and timed conversation with my students last year. I observed that although they were able to speak longer than their initial time and were able to communicate with their partners, most of them produced grammatically incorrect sentences. Did you have the same result with your target group?

--- It happened in my first attempt. Students improved grammatical accuracy after I included the common mistake activities in which I pick some common mistakes as I explained above in Question (2). In the activity, students practice some more examples based on the mistakes. The key point is noticing; students can learn from mistakes. Please see the details in Question (2).

Q (4): Thank you for your wonderful workshop! I was amazed your hardworking, Satsuki-san. I was quite interested about the length of pauses and number of total turns/min, because I can see the result as a quantitative data. Even a weak student improved both. I introduce CSs in my classes. I hope students can also improve their speaking ability step by step.

--- Thanks. Hope this will help your students improve their speaking ability.

Q (5): I understand it is difficult and time-consuming to foster follow-up questions. Is there anything you have particularly done to foster them?

--- I tried many activities to encourage students to use follow-up questions. Some activities worked and some did not work for them, but here are some of the effective ones.

The first one is topic-based follow-up question practice, students ask follow-up questions based on given topics in groups in a limited time. Students share what/how many follow up questions they ask in the group. The topics could be anything as long as they are familiar topics for the students, such as food, your hobby, your holiday, your family, etc.

I also do a seating activity in the beginning of every class. Students decide their seat of the day and sit in order by asking a WH- question, such as the time they get up, their height, the length of their sleep etc.

Lastly, sharing some other students' performance videos (permitted) in class seemed to be effective in order to improve their confidence and motivation. Those older learners are particularly shy to perform in English, in particular they are likely to be afraid of making mistakes from low confidence and anxiety (maybe like many Japanese learners), which are the particular characteristics of third age learners.

Students can feel that they might be able to improve by watching near-peer models. Students start to

think that they can make mistakes like them or they can feel confident becoming like them by watching near-peers' performances whose levels are just a little higher than theirs, since they are of similar age and similar level.

Those are three examples of how I try to support students' use of follow-up questions.

Workshop in May (AR Discussion)

Date: May 8, 2021, 13:00-15:00 (Zoom meeting)

Title: Introduction to AR, Group discussion

Advisers: Kazuyoshi Sato, Duane Kindt, Juanita Heigham (NUFS)

The number of participants: 20



Next workshop will be held on June 12th.

Detailed information is on our web site:

<https://www.nufs.ac.jp/workshop/news/>