

Newsletter No. 1

Workshop in May

“Focus-on-Form Instruction from elementary school to junior and senior high school: Theory and Practice”

Date: May 7th, 2022 13:00-16:00

Venue: NUFS Meieki Campus (BIZrium Nagoya)

Presenter: Sato Kazuyoshi (NUFS), Roxanne Abe (English School)



Abstract:

(Yoshi)

Although communicative language teaching (CLT) has been proven an effective approach, there has been a debate about how to teach grammar within CLT. Is there a way to teach grammar communicatively? How about mechanical drills and grammar explanation? Researchers finally agreed that communicative grammar teaching termed focus-on-form instruction (FFI) is more effective than a traditional way of grammar teaching in early 2000s. In the first session, Roxanne will demonstrate how her six graders developed their speaking ability through communication strategies and FFI in a private language school. In the second session, Sato will demonstrate various tasks based on FFI for junior and senior high school students and show the results of action research conducted by teachers. Participants will experience FFI as students so that they can use the ideas in their classrooms.

(Roxanne)

In Japan, English has been a mandatory school subject in the elementary fifth and sixth grade levels since 2020. All the more reason for teachers to develop a different outlook on language teaching.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been proven an effective approach. This study presents the results of two consecutive years of action research (AR) at a private kindergarten that provides language lessons to elementary students. This research suggests that communication strategies (CSs) and focus-on-form instruction (FFI) aid in L2 learning with reference to speaking fluency. It describes the development of the teacher's knowledge of CLT, the participants' use of CSs, and the effects of FFI on the students' language learning.

The number of participants: 51

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

(Yoshi)

- Doing interviews and encouraging students to talk with a lot of classmates with award. I thought it will motivate students to speak more in a very positive way.
- How to introducing conversation strategies; not by stating them but incorporating them in an activity. I want to try this method in my class.
- All the worksheets and activities seemed useful. I liked them because they had both good input-based activity and enough output activity so that students can have plenty practice in the class with their peers.
- I've been trying focus-on-form instruction, but I've never done poster session in my classes. So, I want to try this in the future.
- I'll use pair work because using the same phrases many times is effective for students.



(Roxanne)

- Giving essay/drawing activities. I have a lot of young students and I think they will enjoy drawing a lot.
- 'Did you go shopping yesterday?' activity; students can practice a lot by asking same questions many times.
- I like the idea of connecting the writing and talking exercises.
- I want to try Bingo. I learned that you can do it in the small size class.

2. What you learned from today's workshop

(Yoshi)

- I had thought it was difficult to make criteria for performance test, but today I learned how to make it and how to do performance test.
- It's important to have a clear goal. Changing partners is important. Teachers don't need to cover all grammar forms for Focus on Form.
- During today's workshop, I was being a student. I really enjoyed your activity. I want my students to enjoy speaking English. I need to make good plans.

- Doing the same activity with different partners three or four times is a good way to improve students' fluency.
- It was amazing to see the test scores of Kushiro-sensei's class in which she used active performance test technique, not following the assigned textbook. I felt how responsible we are as a teacher to create a good class not matter what the textbook is like.
- I learned how to plan and build a Focus on Form lesson plan. It was interesting to know how students could internalize knowledge and understanding of grammar and its usage through F-on-F instruction, then become able to use their skills in their conversation test.

(Roxanne)

- The age doesn't matter when it comes to learning a language.
- Showing the video of their speaking test is effective. Otherwise, many students cannot feel they improve their speaking skills and gain confidence.
- I found it important that students feel the important themselves from Roxanne's talk about the students' comments. Recordings can work as a proof that we can show students' progress and motivate them to do even more.
- Even elementary school children can learn a lot through FFI. Especially I think it's really valuable for them to use communication strategies.
- Showing improvements to students is one of the most important aspects that motivate them. So, the recording and transcribing are necessary.



3. Questions and Answers

(Roxanne)

Q (1): I know you finished your Action Research at NUPS. Are you still going to conduct Action Research in your classroom?

A: As much as I wanted to carry on with research, I was only allowed to do research for my master's degree. If given a chance to conduct research in the future, I would like to continue researching on Japanese students' fluency and accuracy development. Conducting a study in elementary public schools would be interesting as research in this area is scarce.

Q (2): When you demonstrated 'Did you go shopping yesterday?', you talked with Yoshi. In your real class, how do you introduce a model dialog? I always wish I would have an ALT for demonstration.

A: I had to explain the activity to my managers and asked for their help in recording a model dialogue for the students. For other options, you can ask and practice the dialogue with a student before class. It will be more interesting if the model dialogue is between two students.

Q (3): As an activity of explicit teaching of CS, what did you have the students do?

A: I shared information about me or stories that generated reaction from students. They would often react in Japanese or ask follow-up questions. I translated in English and wrote the CSs on the board. After teaching CSs, I did many speaking activities with them such as (1) interview, (2) information gap, (3) similarities/differences where they had to compare their schedules, (4) five-finger game, to practice asking follow-up questions, (5) and speaking tests. They also had worksheet where they figured out the appropriate CSs to use in given situations.

For additional questions: amorosoroxy@gmail.com



(Yoshi)

Q (4): In the performance test, if recording is not possible, what is a good way to check for CS usage?

A: I highly recommend you to record a speaking test so that you can see students' progress (and weak points). You can show a good performance to your students for feedback. If it is not possible, you can check students' CS use with your rubric. Please see a sample rubric.

Q (5): When I had a speaking test. I always asked questions to the students and they answered them. But I found the speaking test you had was different: two students asked and answered each other. Do you think your way is better? Why?

A: Yes, my way is better. There are different kinds of speaking tests. Students can use more CSs with other students and develop their interaction skills in pair conversations. If students know that the final speaking test is done in pairs, students work hard on pair conversations in regular classes.

Q (6): In the speaking test, when one student stops asking questions or another student can't answer the questions, what should they or I do?

A: They can say "Pardon?" (one of the communication strategies) or a good student can help. That is quite natural without a teacher's help.

Q (7): Is there any limitations or cons using the focus on form method? It seemed you highlighted only the positive points.

A: Please see my PPT slides. Traditional grammar teaching is obsolete. However, after students receive focus-on-form instruction. It is OK for teachers to use some drills.

Q (8): My students are not good at studying especially English. So, even if I teach in English, most of them can't understand what I say. I want to know how to make them motivate.

A: Please try to use focus-on-form instruction by using worksheets in my book. You can motivate your students.

Q (9): I'm wondering how controlled the performance tests are. And how well-prepared they have to be in advance.

A: Teaching and testing should be hand in hand. It means focus-on-form activities they practiced should be used as performance tests.

Q (10): I want to learn more activities for senior high school students.

A: I have published two books for senior high school teachers.

Q (11): How will you adopt these activities in Communication English (reading) class?

A: Focus-on-form activities are for grammar teaching, not for teaching reading. There is an approach called "skills integration" which is an approach to teach reading. Here is a DVD.

<https://www.japanlaim.co.jp/fs/jplm/gd7014>

Q (12): How do teachers use a textbook?

A: As I explained, please use focus-on-form instruction first, followed by using a textbook.

Q (13): Can reviewing grammar be an incidental Focus on Form?

A: Yes. Please see one of the books I published. It is titled a review task.

Q (14): Some teachers say that a lot of sample sentences are necessary to have students notice grammar points and

that teachers can save time if they teach grammar points initially. What do you think?

A: Many sample sentences in the textbook are not useful, because they are not contextualized and students are not interested. Input should be comprehensible!!



Next Workshop will be held on June 11th. Detailed information is here:

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