

NUFS Workshop 2010

Newsletter No. 2

Workshop in June

(Part 1)

Date: June 12, 2010, 10:30-14:30

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

Instructor: David Barker (BTB Press)

Title: "Getting Back to Basics in ELT"

Abstract: The history of English Language Teaching has been characterized by a stream of ever-changing fashions and trends. One example of this is the way

that many highly effective methodologies have fallen out of favour in recent years because they are no longer deemed to be sufficiently 'communicative'. This is in spite of the fact that a wealth of research evidence exists to show that many of them are, in fact, highly beneficial for learners. In this workshop, we will discuss the meaning of "getting back to basics" in ELT, and look at how "old-fashioned" techniques can still play a part in the modern language classroom.



The number of participants: 40

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

- I found a group activity interesting. As a group we examined some common mistakes in English. We first read answers and explanations individually and then we explained to each other what were wrong and why. If I try something like this in my class, students may understand grammar points better. Instead of just listening to the teacher, they will participate more actively.
- Letting my students know some typical mistakes in grammar use, and utilize such information in the peer editing.
- Create a JTE English club to discuss Japanese English, find misuses of English, and identify why they are wrong. This would be an interesting topic for teacher conversations, self study and professional development.
- As far as activities in class, perhaps I shouldn't be so hesitant to try to explain things in Japanese. I think sometimes it might be more efficient. Also, the students might gain motivation seeing me (their AET) trying to explain some points in Japanese.
- Today's workshop pointed me with many insights to my teaching ability. I would definitely want to use some of the common grammatical mistakes that ESL students often make.
- Information exchange: Sharing new ideas others don't know is good way to attract attention.
- Find the common mistakes in English sentences and correct them: That could be a good chance to let students find the difference between English and Japanese (language and cultural aspects.)

2. What you learned from today's workshop.

- Today's lecture made a lot of sense to me. The two idioms and the six fundamental principles introduced in the lecture were what I had long wanted to hear. I hear many new and different ideas on second language acquisition and second language teaching, which sometimes confuses me. The lecture reminded me of something very simple. There is no one best way to learn or teach English, and balance and commitment are essential for success.
- Three steps how to correct students' English: point out, correct and explain. Teachers should know them and be able to explain. I really would like to get the book to learn.
- I've taught students the passive voice for a long time, but I have never taught them in what situation the passive voice is used. Today I knew that it's important for teachers to teach students when and in what situation the sentence and the word are used.
- So much. I learned the importance of keeping a balance of methods when teaching English. Just because certain methods may seem out of dates doesn't mean we should quit using them i.e. grammar-translation method. Also, I shouldn't focus too much on making English FUN! Just because I'm bored, doesn't mean the students are.
- I learned a lot in today's workshop. The workshop helped me reevaluate the English language and provided me a way to explain how the English language works. The ability to explain students' mistake has given me a better outlook on what I need to do as an AET teacher to correct students' mistakes.
- English (especially grammar) should be taught in three dimensions: form, meaning, and use. 'Use' might have placed less importance in English education in Japan.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): Fundamental principle #4 says learning a language requires memorization. Do you have any tips on how to memorize vocabulary?

A: The key to memorizing vocabulary is to be systematic in your approach. As I mentioned on Saturday, memorizing vocabulary is a process that takes place over time, and it requires a cycle of "priming" (becoming aware of words through focused learning) and "triggering" (meeting or using the words in context). There is actually a unit on effective study techniques in my book *Learning English Vocabulary*, so I will send a PDF of that to Chihaya.

Q (2): I agree using the first language is useful, but Japanese and English are very different. So sometimes it's hard to translate properly, but the students tend to stick to translation. Is there any good way to use translation in a classroom?

A: As I said in my presentation, unless you are completely immersed in the second language environment for an extended period (preferably at a very young age), the only possible way to learn is by reference to your first language. When my Japanese teacher pointed to a chair and said *isu*, I was not thinking "イスというのは、足が4本付いてる家具だ, I was thinking "isu means 'chair.'" The problem in Japan is not an overreliance on translation, but a failure to teach/learn its limitations and pitfalls. For example, most

of the students I have taught at university seem completely unaware of things like the range of meaning of words, the cultural implications of fixed expressions, the importance of learning collocations, and basic differences in the meanings of tenses. (All of these points are covered in my red book. If you would like to introduce any of them to your students, please feel free to copy the relevant pages.)

In class, there are many interesting things you can do with translation. One idea is to give out a script of an English movie dialogue and ask the students to come up with Japanese subtitles. You could then watch just that one scene on the DVD and ask students to compare their suggestions to the actual words they see on the screen. It is important to stress that different translators will write in different ways because translation is not just a simple matter of using a dictionary to put English words into Japanese sentences (or vice versa). Doing this exercise should help students to see that for themselves.

Another interesting exercise is to use translation software (翻訳ソフト) to translate a passage from the students' textbooks. Show the students the results (which will usually be quite comical), and ask them to work out what the computer got wrong and what caused the mistakes. This exercise gives students a great deal of insight into the difficulties and pitfalls of translation.

Probably the most important thing to teach, however, is that the skill of translating from one language to another requires a much higher level of knowledge than the skill of producing the second language using simple words and structures. Students need to understand that if they think of a sentence in Japanese and then try to express it in English, it will almost always be either incorrect or unnatural. This is because their Japanese level is much, much higher than their English level, and they do not have the skills of a translator. What students need to think about is how to say something similar to what they want to say using much simpler language. In other words, they need to practise changing difficult Japanese into very simple Japanese that a small child could understand.



In my own classes, I used to give students cards with Japanese sentences on them and ask them to rephrase those sentences using only simple words. One example that I remember is *ninshin*, which students reworded as 'She has a baby in her stomach'. A good source for this kind of exercise is newspaper stories. Take a complicated story from a Japanese newspaper, and ask students to explain it using language that a small Japanese child (or a learner of Japanese) could understand. If possible, get them to come up with several different versions. This exercise helps students to develop the flexibility they will need in order to express complex ideas with limited linguistic resources.

Q (3): Any suggestions on how to convince some Japanese teachers of English to use Japanese and not feel bound to all English in their classrooms?

A: Is this really a problem? Are there Japanese teachers who only ever use English in their classroom? I would be surprised to hear that. A quote that I often use in presentations and workshops is one from Penny Ur: "There is nothing that should always or never be done in the classroom, and even that is an over-generalization." As with everything, the aim is to achieve a balance between the use of English and the use of Japanese, and to achieve that balance in such a way that efficiency is maximized. For example, it may be possible for students to understand an all-English grammar explanation, but if it takes 15 minutes where a Japanese explanation would have taken only 5, then 10 minutes of time have been lost that could probably have been used more productively.

Q (4): How do I brush up my English? I don't have confidence to say right or wrong to students' writing.

A: The simple answer to this is SHAPAL - Study Hard And Practise A Lot!

If you are not a native speaker, you can never be 100% confident about saying what is wrong and what is right in English. I cannot do that in Japanese even though I have lived here for 14 years and use the language every day. It is important to remember, however, that native speakers are often unsure about their own language as well. I know a girl who had the sentence "I like grapefruits" marked wrong and corrected by a Canadian teacher. He probably marked it wrong because he would not say it that way himself. If he had checked in his dictionary, however, he would have seen that the plural of 'grapefruit' can be either "grapefruit" or "grapefruits," so the student's sentence was actually correct.

As you go through your career, you will find yourself constantly meeting phrases and sentences that you are not sure about. At that point, you need to find the answer either by looking in books or by asking a proficient speaker of English. (Google is also a very useful resource. "Google" a phrase and see if it comes up in any sites written by native speakers. I did this a lot when I was writing the errors dictionary.) In some cases, it may be better to ask several proficient speakers, as most Americans have no idea about British English usage, and vice versa. As I said in the presentation, please feel free to email me (david@btbpress.com) if you cannot find anyone to help you.



Of course, when you ask a question and find out the answer, you will know whether this structure is right or wrong the next time you meet it. Over a number of years, you will build up your database of knowledge about the language. This is the kind of knowledge that you can only really get from experience.

By the way, when I was writing my errors book, I often became so confused that I was no longer able to trust my own judgement about what was correct and what was wrong, so it is not only non-native speakers who feel this way!

Q (5): How can I learn proper English, for example difference between 'last' and 'continue'? I'll buy David's book, but books and dictionaries have limit.

A: Again, this is a question of experience. Please bear in mind that none of the native speakers at the presentation got the answer to that question correct. When the student asked me, I had to think about it for an hour and check several dictionaries before I was able to answer her. The most important thing is to have a network of people that you can talk to and bounce ideas off, and to get used to thinking about language in an analytical way.

Q (6): Actually I myself make a lot of errors when I speak or write English. As I'm not a native English speaker, I can't understand nor explain what is wrong with my English. Now I'm feeling afraid of using English. Would you give me some advice?

A: As a non-native speaker, you will never reach the point where you can write anything you want in English with complete confidence. Teachers of subjects like mathematics and history might be able to claim perfect knowledge of their field (at least to the level that they need to teach to their students), but language is simply not that type of subject. If I were to teach Japanese to British children, I would

present myself not as a “teacher,” but rather as a learner of Japanese who is more advanced than they are. No matter what weaknesses you may have in your own English, you are still far, far more advanced than your students, and that is all you need in order to be an effective teacher for them.

As a writer, I realize now that some of the things I have written in the past were actually wrong. In fact, I cannot believe now that I ever had the confidence to try to write a book with so little knowledge. I’m sure, however, that I will feel the same way about my current books when I look back on them in ten years. My choice, therefore, is between doing the best that I can do now, or giving up and not even trying because I am scared of making mistakes. I choose the former option. All any educator can do is make sure that we know more today than we knew yesterday, and then not be afraid to do whatever we need to do in order to put ourselves in the position of knowing more tomorrow than we know today.

I guess that in my workshop, a few Japanese teachers were shocked to find out that “Is it delicious?” and “I was moved by the beautiful ocean” are unnatural. It is easy to see how these teachers could lose confidence. However, imagine that there are two teachers in a school – Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher A chooses to go to a workshop on her day off in order to learn more about her profession. Teacher B chooses to take the day off and go shopping. At the workshop, teacher A realizes that there is a gap in her knowledge that she had not been aware of before. This causes her to lose a bit of confidence, but she also learns from it. When these two teachers go into their classrooms on Monday morning, Teacher B is still full of confidence, but this is only because he has not been made aware of his ignorance. Teacher A has lost a bit of confidence, but she has a deeper understanding of English because of her experience. Which of these do you think will be a better teacher for the students?



I believe that it is very important never to be afraid of finding out that you do not know something (or that something you thought you knew was actually wrong). The brightest and most intelligent people almost never think about how much they know because they are too busy worrying about how much they still have to learn. Here are some nice quotes from Albert Einstein that illustrate this point:

“Do not worry about your difficulties in mathematics. I can assure you mine are still greater.”

“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.”

“I think and think for months and years. Ninety-nine times, the conclusion is false. The hundredth time I am right.”

I hope that helps to restore your confidence.

(Part 2)

Date: June 12 2010, 14:30-17:00

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

Advisor: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh, Paul Crane (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Abstract: Monthly report on action research

The number of participants: 25



Workshop in July (Schedule)

Date: July 3, 2010, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 31

Instructors: Yukimi Fukumoto (Hotei Junior High School), Mittsuru Hirano (Kagamihara High School)

Please email Chihaya ([chiha143\(at-mark\)nufs.ac.jp](mailto:chiha143(at-mark)nufs.ac.jp)) to participate this workshop.

