

[研究ノート]

World Englishes at Tama University

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Introduction

A Language Partner Programme (LPP) was started in order to provide Japanese learners of English and foreign learners of Japanese a venue to study their respective second languages (L2). The idea of the programme is simply an exchange of time to practice their language of study. For example, partners may choose to speak for one hour or longer in English, and then for the same amount of time in Japanese, all the while helping each other by correcting grammar, pronunciation and so on.

With three aims in mind, a Language Partner Programme (LPP) was started for 19 Home Seminar students in 2006, at Tama University.

- The first aim was to provide Japanese learners of English at Tama University with an opportunity to practice their English.
- The second aim was to expose the Japanese students to ‘Speakers of English as a Second Language’ (SE2L) from varied cultures in the hope that the multi-cultural, common L2 environment would make obvious to the Japanese students the importance, indeed ‘enjoyment’ of trial and error, when communicating in an L2.

- The third aim was to introduce a variety of ‘World Englishes’ to the Japanese students in the hope of awakening a realization and inspiration to take ownership of ‘their English’.

This paper is a reflection on the programme and some of the students’ experiences expressed in their own words.

An Opportunity to Practice English

In the L1 environment it is extremely difficult to engage in practice of an L2 with a native L2 speaker without being in one of the following situations; having a native speaking spouse of your L2, paying for classes or private tuition in the L2, working or studying in an environment where your L2 is used. Hence, it was a deliberate focus of the LPP to invite SE2L to join the programme. Native speakers of English were also invited, however it was assumed, and as resultant attendance seemed to be evidence of, native speakers had little interest or need for such a language exchange programme. Perhaps this is due to their easy access to L2 (Japanese) practice opportunities whilst living in Japan.

The LPP meetings were held once a month at the

Tama campus. It was first hoped to have a one-on-one balance of foreign and Japanese students, however, as it turned out, one foreign student to two Japanese students was the preferred ratio. The Japanese students' all felt that one-on-one would be too linguistically demanding for them.

Exposure to a Multi-cultural Environment

Some L2 learners of English can be reluctant to speak due to a fear of making mistakes. Even though the classroom environment can be a safe environment for making mistakes, students may still harbor inhibitions when it comes to speaking. It is through speaking though that language learners test their hypotheses of the L2 grammar and functions, i.e. their inter-language. Trial and error allows the students to consolidate their learning and re-formulate theories about the L2 grammar and its use.

Vygotsky's (1934 / 1962) sociocultural theory maintains that learning first begins intermentally, between minds, or socially and later through further processing becomes intramentally set for personal use (Murphey, T. 2003). Following this theory, my challenge as a teacher of English at Tama University is to introduce students to environments where they can stretch their ability, knowledge and experience base.

Another consideration was the students' self perceptions about their own and their peers' abilities. If one considers the gap between the language production of a native speaker (NS) like the students' teacher or any NS of English, and a lower level L2 learner, the role model of the NS actually represents more of a distance that could be seemingly unattainable to the students. It can be perceived as a

goal that is years away and therefore may even have a negative impact on learners at some stage.

Hence, the interaction between L2 speakers who share common trials and hardships of learning the L2 can provide the opportunity for a successful L2 communication experience. Introducing SE2L to my Japanese students provided role models who could communicate freely and effectively without excessive worry about making mistakes. The general attitude towards communicating in an L2 held by the foreigners was "It's not my first language. Of course I don't speak it perfectly." It is this attitude exactly that I believe will help my inhibited JSE2L in their language acquisition. More the point, the foreigners offered better role models upon whom my students could model themselves more easily because the foreigners' levels of language ability is perceived by the JSE2L as being closer, and therefore, a more realistically achievable goal. This is especially important for the lower level JSE2L.

Taking Ownership

Throughout the world's population, the number of speakers of English as a second language outweighs speakers of English as a first language. So it is most likely that Japanese speakers of English as a second language (JSE2L) who go on to use their English at work, will find themselves having to communicate in English with other speakers of English as a second language (SE2L). English being the language of international business exposes JSE2L to foreign trade connections such as Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Malaysian, Thai, and Indian speakers of English as a second language.

This is why it is necessary to bring Tama University students into contact with foreign speakers of English as second language. The foreigners whom the Tama students met were from 14 countries in all - Canada (Quebec), China, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Korea, Lebanon, Pakistan, Philippines, Switzerland, and Thailand. Tokyo is rich in foreign cultures. It was possible to find such a diverse range of cultures to mix with and learn about through practicing an L2 within a relatively short period.

On a more linguistic note, it is well documented that second language (L2) is affected by first language (L1). Arguably, some of the effects can have positive results, depending on the grammatical and phonological similarities between the two languages in question. However, studies being carried out on 'decoding' are looking at 'how vocabulary recognition influences comprehension.' In addition, studies of listening strategies are looking at the affective, social, and cognitive strategies that influence the learner's confidence, willingness to participate, and effectiveness in understanding.

Both 'decoding' and listening strategies can be addressed in an indirect way through LPP meetings. In the LPP, the Japanese students get to practice their English with other SE2L and simultaneously are exposed to a broad spectrum of phonological diversity.

Students comments from after the meetings are listed below.

Student # 1

This is an example of a student learning a new listening strategy. This student notes the difficulty in under-

standing and being understood and so the student adapted his/her pronunciation so as to be understood.

“I noticed - different pronunciation. Particularly, pronunciation of the word “Where” was very different. My pronunciation wasn’t understood by them . I think I tried to talk more to them and my pronunciation changed. And I enjoyed the meeting.”

Student # 2

This student reveals his / her comfort level was high enough to practice eye contact.

But I had a wonderful experience in this Language Partner Program. That wonderful experience was “to meet with foreign people” and “to speak with foreign people”. My weak point was “I could not see (look at) my companion’s eyes as I talked” But in this Language Partner Program, I could try that thing.

Student # 3

There also is one comment that native speakers of English are the best to study with. However, this does not reflect on a linguistic point, but on social interaction.

It is easier to study with people who can not speak Japanese because I can use English all the time. My partner and I used Japanese a lot more than English.

In summary, the programme has only been underway for one semester, so any conclusion drawn at this time would be premature. However, it is the writer's intent to continue to report on the individuals

and groups progress as the LPP meetings enter the second semester. Having said that, these three recounts of experience from JSE2L are, to the writer at least, proof of the benefit of introducing SE2L and Japanese E2L learners to each other for language exchange study.

Bibliography

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