Combining Communicative Competence with Pattern Practice Drills*

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I. Introduction

This paper is about the idea of combining Pattern Practice Drills (PPDs) with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the speaking classes at the university level. This combination will probably strike many as incongruous at first. However, a closer look might prove a little different. In order to comfirm this idea, this paper reviews major teaching methods and various theories behind them, examining individual advantages as well as disadvantages.

Table 1 Learning Skills Emphasized by University Students and Teachers shows the various skills required for language learning. The skill non-English majors want to develop most is speaking.

Table 1
Learning Skills Emphasized by University Students and Teachers*

	Students	Teachers
Speaking	61.0%	18.1%
Reading	21.2%	80.3%
Listening	14.7%	28.6%
Writing	3.1%	19.9%

*More than one answer is allowed (Watanabe, 1990)

Developing the speaking skill is a primary goal for 61% of learners in studying English, while the reading skill is still the primary concern of 80% of teachers. Although there are no more entrance examinations to worry about once students enter a university, teachers still seem

less than enthusiastic about teaching speaking.

It is hard to say that language teaching in Japanese high schools and colleges is currently embracing communicative approaches as Ellis (1991) says. High school teachers cannot ignore the written-based college entrance examinations, and college teachers tend to be involved with their research. Also, most of the teachers are not native speakers of English, so they tend to think they are not qualified to teach speaking. There is, however, a strong demand from students and society to develop stronger communicative abilities for use in the "international world." How, then, do we deal with this situation?

II. Outline of Methods Used in Teaching Speaking

As a first step, let's look at a brief outline of how English has been taught in the past in Japan. There have been many different methods used in Japan. The main ones were Grammar Translation, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), the Direct Method, Free Conversation and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The first method to be used was Grammar Translation, and it is still being used by many teachers. As its name implies, this method emphasizes grammar and the ability to translate. It mainly teaches the reading skill with some attention paid to writing. Grammar Translation is highly favored in Japan because it allows the teachers and students to use their native language to talk about the language and because it can be used with large numbers of students. However, it is losing popularity because it does not lent itself well to the practice of speaking.

On the other hand, ALM does emphasize speaking. There are two good points about ALM. One, memorizing the dialogues gives the students a chance to learn a model for speaking, and two, the Pattern Practice Drills (PPDs) which are a prominent feature of the method are well established means for achieving a natural fluency. There will be a closer look at PPDs later in this paper.

There are, however, several negative points. One is the over contrived dialogues and two, the tendency to make a drill out of every utterance.

The Direct Method has also been widely used. Like ALM it also emphasizes the speaking skill. Since it is one-on-one, it involves the students directly, and it is student centered. There is one large drawback to the Direct Method. It does not work well with large groups. And, since the native language of the student is never to be used, many Japanese teachers are uncomfortable with it and reluctant to use it.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the newest method to be used in Japan. CLT has several strong points. First, it emphasizes interactions through the use of pair and group work. Since most university classes meet only once a week and there are 50 to 60 students in a class, the teacher is not able to spend any significant amount of time talking directly with each individual student. By utilizing pair and group work, the teacher can ensure that all students will have ample speaking practice time. Also the lessons in CLT are student centered. The lessons focus on the students themselves and their ideas. They do not teach new ideas so much as they attempt to have students put their own ideas into speech. There is one problem with CLT. When students answer questions in a CLT class, their answers are often limited to "Yes", "No" or single nouns. Attempts at longer sentences often result in phrases like "I live Kurume" or "I am Japan." Many reasons are considered for these types of utterances. First, it is the lack of explanations as to what is acceptable conversationally. This is exacerbated by the tendency in CLT to accept any answer as long as the meaning is conveyed. Grammatical correction is rarely made as far as the utterance is comprehensible. Second, it is the lack of models. CLT doesn't provide any. Since students do not have an appropriate model, they are forced to look back to the faulty models provided by grammar classes.

Given the fact that students want to be able to speak more, and

teachers now appear to favor CLT, it would seem beneficial to try to overcome this lack of models for speech. Combining PPDs with CLT would be one possible answer to this dilemma.

III. Reviews of PPDs

Let us now look at PPDs themselves, — both the positive and the negative aspects.

1. Linguistic Competence Over Communicative Competence

In the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), linguistic competence rather than communicative competence is the desired goal. This is the most commonly pointed to reason for the failure of PPDs. Both teaching and learning place emphasis on form and structure rather than meaning, so language items are not properly contextualized. Drilling is the central technique and overlearning through drilling is believed to lead to reinforcement. For example, in Lesson 1 of "English 900" Book 3 there are 239 sentences to be produced according to various directions. Richards and Rodgers (1986) summarize the differences between ALM and CLT in terms of 22 items. One of the main points in ALM is that the target linguistic system will be learned through the overt teaching of the patterns rather than through the process of struggling to communicate. Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises. Formal correctness is a primary goal, so errors must be prevented at all costs. Consequently, learners are worried about making errors and hesitate to try to communicate.

2. Neurofunctional Problems in PPDs

Lamendella (1979) discussed the failure of PPDs from the neurofunctional point of view. She hypothesized, referring to the study of aphasia, that speech-copying circuits, or close shadowing of the speech of another person often render disassociation of the repetition function from the higher level language processing systems such as the acquisition of lexical and syntactic function. This would account for the impression of many learners that while engaged in PPDs, their minds

are often on other things. This might be because once the new pattern was mastered, or that is to say automatized, there is no reason why the conscious involvement would be required for their execution.

Let us now argue against these claims. First, "Is it true that the ALM does not contribute to language learning?"

In order to develop the performative competence of a foreign language, no one doubts that practice is necessary. As shown in the earlier example of the English 900 textbook, learners are expected to produce so many sentences according to the directions. In other words, ALM consists of a lot of practice. Practice enables learners to improve their performance. The problem is how to provide the best kind of practice in the right amount at the right stage.

The effect of practice has recently been reevaluated by Bialystok (1978 and 1981) and McLaughlin (1987). Bialystok classifies practice as a formal practice and functional practice depending on the nature of the endeavor with respect to the purpose dimension. Formal practice is the specific exercise of the language code for the sake of mastering the rule system. It relates to structural and propositional meaning of language, while functional practice occurs when the language learner increases his opportunity to use the language for communication. The two types of practices are, in other words, related to the well-known competences; the former relates to linguistic competence, and the latter to communicative competence.

PPD exercises such as changing into proper forms, memorizing vocabulary lists and reciting various sounds fall into the formal practice, where knowledge of rules rather than the content of meaning are the focal point of the activity. Functional practice occurs, according to Bialystok, "when the learners increase their opportunity to use the language for communication by going to movies, reading books, or talking to native speakers" (p.374). The problem of how to combine these two types of practices still remains.

CLT emphasizes appropriateness in the use of language: the right

thing to say at the right time. The context of the situation is as important as the speaker/hearer relationship. It is true that the idea of PPDs does not account enough for appropriateness which deeply relates to sociolinguistic competence rather than grammatical competence all of which consist of communicative competence.

Tarone (1984) gives an example of an ESL student who has acquired grammatical competence in a target language and manages to get a basic message across, but who fails to do so in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner. Disagreeing with a teacher's point in class, for example, a learner shouts "No. You're wrong." Certainly, there is nothing grammatically wrong here, and the message is clear enough, but the problem has to do with the appropriateness. She attributes this failure to not having learned how to convey information effectively, saying that "this is not necessarily because their vocabulary or grammar is inadequate, but because they have not learned how to convey information effectively by using the linguistic resources they have" (p.128).

Is it true that learners really don't know how to say this appropriately? Don't they have any idea of politeness strategy in English? In order to examine whether they have some idea about English politeness, the following test was given. Six politeness levels from (1) "I'd appreciate it if you could turn down the radio" to (6) "Turn down the radio" were given as seen in table 2. These 6 levels were judged as the most polite to the least polite expressions by native speakers according to Tanaka and Kawade's study (1982). Tanaka and Kawade indicate that there are significant differences between all the adjacent pairs such as between (1) and (2) and between (2) and (3). The subjects are 83 low-intermediate Japanese learners of English who are non-English major students.

As seen in the table, the students know the order of politeness in English fairly well except level 4: the structure of "Turn down the radio, will you?" seems less polite to those students than it does to

native speakers. Kruskal-Walls test shows that there are significant differences between (2) and (3) and between (5) and (6), suggesting that the politeness levels can be divided into three groups: (1) and (2) as the first group, (3), (4) and (5) as the second group, and (6) as the third group. We can say at least that the students could distinguish these three levels of politeness in English.

Next, we examined how the same students used different expressions in their first language, Japanese, for disagreement with 4 different types of people: a distinguished professor, a young sociable professor, one's father, and a friend (either girl or boy). Thirty-two students replied to the Japanese questions as shown in table 3.

Table 2
Order of Polite Expressions Assigned by Learners

English order	Assingned order	% of correctness
(1) I'd appreciate it if...	1.3	72
(2) Would you...	2.0	69
(3) Can you...	3.7	40
(4) ..., will you?	4.2	10
(5) I want you to...	3.9	30
(6) Turn down...	6.0	99

Table 3
Most Frequent Use of Expressions with 4 Types of Speakers

Speaker	Japanese expressions (English)	%
A distinguished professor	Watashi-wa.....dato omou (I think that ...)	30%
A young sociable professor	Watashino kangae-wa chigaimasu (My opinion is different)	42%
One's father	Chigau (Different)	36%
A friend (either girl or boy)	Chigau-n-dewa-nai-no (Isn't it different?)	47%

No learner would say "Iie, Sensei wa machigatte imasu" which is one of the corresponding Japanese versions of "No. You're wrong" when speaking with a teacher. It sounds very rude even in Japanese and people in most cultures would have a similar negative reaction to this expression. As these results show, the students have learned how to convey information appropriately in various situations through acquiring L1, and they also know fairly well which are the most polite and the least polite expressions in English. Why, then, do they say "No. You're wrong."

This is most likely to due to the lack of consciousness, lack of vocabulary and lack of practice. Lack of consciousness means that the students take it for granted that since English is a casual language, any expression is acceptable as long as it conveys meaning. They tend to ignore the appropriateness in language use. Lack of vocabulary means that the students may be structurally competent, but they have not been taught enough lexis to convey the relevant politeness. Lack of practice means that the students have not practiced enough to use the expressions appropriately and fluently in situations, especially when they are speaking under pressure.

The main point here is that much of this sort of sociolinguistic and strategic competence is a universal rule of use, or a fact of the real world. As Ando (1991) points out, it seems a waste of time to especially make "rule of use" and explain it. Rather, it is necessary to pay more attention to teaching vocabulary, including various sociolinguistic expressions, through the use of PPDs. Swan (1985) also emphasizes the importance of vocabulary rather than teaching strategic competence.

It is also true that cultural differences are reflected in language. There are some, but not too many though, conventional and idiomatic expressions that students should be taught in order to avoid misunderstanding. Here again, it is better not to wait for the student to become consciously aware of these expressions through the long process

of struggling to communicate. It is better to make a list of these expressions, explain them explicitly, and give students ample time to practice them through classroom interactions.

Now for Lamendella's second claim. She says that PPDs render disassociation from the higher language systems. Once the new patterns has been mastered, the conscious involvement of the higher level language systems would not be required. However, when we look at the positive aspects of PPDs from the point of cognitive psychological approach, more benefits can be obtained from PPD-type practice. The cognitive psychological approach regards second language learning as a complex cognitive skills which are learned and routinized (i.e. become automatized) through initial use of controlled processes. The speech productions which are once acquired by controlled processing are likely stored in automatized routines at lower levels. McLaughlin (1987) says that practice can have two different effects: 1) practice leads to improvement in performance as subskills become automatized, and 2) practice leads to restructuring. This explains some evidence that fluent non-native speakers frequently admit that they utilize lots of the automatized routines through substituting or expanding the necessary vocabulary and phrases or through revising into more suitable structural patterns to convey their communication goals. The more patterns and vocabulary are automatized, the more conscious-based communication becomes possible. Ellis (1985) also recognizes the importance of primary process such as pattern use and formulaic speech and secondary process such as monitoring and borrowing. Concerning this characteristic, Widdowson (1991) also mentions that "there must be some aspects of language learning which have to do with habit formation. Effective communication depends on the immediate and automatic access to linguistic forms so that the mind can consciously engage in the more creative business of negotiation of meaning" (p.11).

VI. Combining PPDs with Communicative Competence

Combining PPDs with communicative competence activities can be an effective way to eliminate the disassociation from meaning. By introducing attention-based practices and classroom interactions teachers can make mechanical PPDs more creative in various ways. Some of the examples are:

(1) Instead of mechanical PPDs, students could make their own drills and practice them with their partners until the relevant patterns become fluent.

(2) Students could also record their own drills and exchange their tapes with their partners to compare their ideas.

(3) Students could focus on changing meaning one time and changing structure the next, thus paying more attention to ordinary chorus readings.

(4) Students could be given a time constraint to direct attention to the fluency, the amount of message, the number of modification, etc.

Dialogs could also be changed in order to make them more meaningful to the students. For example, students could be asked to make their own dialogues based on model dialogue and then to memorize and practice them with their partners. They could also change their partners and practice the dialogues by revising them into more suitable patterns for the partners. Another idea would be to have students read the different parts while trying to show different emotions such as disappointment, eagerness, anger, or sorrow, etc.

Finally, to avoid misunderstanding in culturally related expressions, we can make a list of conventional and idiomatic expressions and show them in appropriate model dialogues through classroom interactions.

V. Conclusion

I have discussed some positive and negative points about recent CLT and the traditional PPDs, and proposed an idea for combining these

two methods to promote speaking activities in the classroom. The most important but often forgotten aspect of the PPDs is that if the PPDs are embedded into more meaningful interactions, they will lead to fluency in the phonological features of the target language and automatization of already acquired grammatical patterns. This fluency cannot be accomplished by using CLT alone. Once the patterns become automatic and fluency is developed, the learners do not have to be conscious about these parts any more and can concentrate on other aspects which require more controlled processing such as communicating their own ideas and meanings or searching for more appropriate expressions.

There is no doubt that developing the speaking skill will be demanded more and more in English teaching in Japan. Many university students go to another school to study so-called "English Conversation." This tendency is sometimes called "a double school phenomenon." In addition, every year more and more students go abroad for various language programs ranging from a short-term summer study to a year of home stay. Why do they do so? The answer is obvious in most cases: to develop the speaking ability. There must be some space left for revising routinized classroom activities into somewhat more creative ways. More efforts will be made to find out how it can be done.

NOTE
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