

Using Color Coded English In English As A Foreign Language Classes

——To Investigate the Usefulness of Color Coded Grammar in Teaching English in a Foreign Second Language Mono-Linguistic Class Environment——

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language (henceforth referred to as EFL) in Japanese universities to a majority of Japanese national students has for many years allowed the individual private university the freedom to decide as to whether they would use an immersion teaching technique or if they would use the Japanese students first language in order to teach the second language. However employing this bilingual instruction technique becomes less effective when there are many students in a classroom from differing first languages, as is the case of universities in Japan who take exchange students from other countries.

This research note sites some methods of teaching which use colors and objects in order to teach, and hopes to set the stage for future study of the color-coded-grammar technique in a classroom setting where students do not share a common first language.

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1. Multi-National and Multi-Ethnic Classes

(1) International Students in Japan

When exchange students enter a Japanese university and enroll in English language classes, if they choose a university which teaches English from the platform of the Japanese language, those students must study Japanese and English simultaneously. Yearly enrollments of foreign students to Japanese universities are on the rise, according to information on the homepage for the *Japan Student Services Organization* (2016: 5). The homepage states that, “the number of students as of May 1, 2016 is 239,287 persons, which is an increase of 30,908 persons (14.8%) compared with the result of the previous year.”

When international exchange students enter an EFL class environment where the first language is Japanese, (i.e. not their own first language) their study workload is increased. This workload is more than that experienced by Japanese nationals studying English in their own first language. The number of universities that teach their courses in English in Japan is increasing, and it seems that this is a logical move for schools that wish to attract more foreign exchange students to their campuses.

International exchange students come into the

country they are visiting, mentally prepared to use a language other than their first language. This readiness to study in and use a language other than their first language lends them a toughness of character, and possibly a greater level of commitment than students studying a new subject in their own country and in their own first language.

However, while these international students may have some inbuilt toughness, the extra workload of learning a third language, (English) through their second language (Japanese) puts an extra burden on their study schedule, and is likely to even effect their scoring in tests and examinations.

One way to level the playing field between Japanese Nationals and international exchange students is to teach English only by using English. The private English language education sector in Japan has been doing this for years, and provides a good example of how it is possible.

Some of the difficulties that students experience in such immersion style classroom environments are frustration at not being able to say what they want to say as fast as they can think it; and not having access to their own first language (as it is a rule not to use dictionaries for finding words in some class environments). These factors reduce adult learners to the equivalent learning age of children in the second language

which they are attempting to acquire.

In fact these are serious stresses upon children and adult learners alike, which detract from the potential enjoyment of learning a new language, and also reduce the efficiency of doing so.

Conversely, students who use their first language to acquire a second language, have immediate accessibility to explanations of grammar (from their instructors or textbooks) and translations of words that assist them to reach almost instantaneous understanding of the meanings of sentence patterns and words. As a disadvantage of the bilingual approach, and because of the level of comfort experienced when being able to use their own language in a bilingual setting, students can choose not to speak the target language of their lessons, and may rather decide to rely on their first language longer, because it is easier to do so. With the right strategies in place, students can be assisted by their classroom teachers to overcome their fears, and even make global changes to their lives according to Robbins (1992).

(2) Color-Coded Grammar

One of the greatest problems facing international students in an EFL environment where they are being taught in their second or even third language is that grammar instructions are usually complicated to look at, and need teacher introduction through lecturing. Foreign students are forced to listen in their second language, and to try to keep up. One of the benefits of the immersion language teaching technique is that it gives every student an equal language base to study in. However, this still creates the problem of making adult learners study language at a level of efficacy lower than if they were able to use their first language.

Techniques such as the Callan Method are useful in that students can learn how to respond to questions quickly from set situations. Such forms of teaching language don't directly show the student the relationships between words and performance goes down when there is a high student: teacher ratio. To contrast this a more creative style of teaching that utilizes color-coded grammar shows students the roles that words play as parts of speech. Instead of the teacher standing

in front of the class explaining the grammar, hands on activities may be employed by utilizing color-codes to intuitively teach the proper locations of certain types of words within a particular pattern of grammar and speech.

Colors are a visual cue, and within games and with repetition students can enjoyably and easily form new sentences in their target language without long explanations from their instructors.

A great many basic sentences and language needs can be covered in classes where students are of false beginner levels by merely assisting them to independently and

The 18 Color-Styles			
	Solid underline	Dotted underline	Dashed underline
Aqua	(Determiner / Adjective)	{Adjective}	[Adverb]
Blue	(Noun)	{Noun}	[Noun]
Purple	Verbal	Verbal	[Adverb]
Red	Verb	Verbal	[Adverb]
Orange	Auxiliary Verb	Aux. Verbal	Auxiliary Verb
Black	Preposition	Conjunction	[Adverb / Interjection]
	(Paranthesis)	{Braces}	[Brackets]
Diagram— 1 O'Brien's Color Code			

consistently put the right words in the right places in a sentence. On his homepage O'Brien (2012) describes 18 color styles in combination with 3 kinds of underlining, that can be used to explain detailed grammar workings visually.

The advantage of using such a color-coding approach to explain grammar is that it is compact in comparison to the traditional grammar tree diagrams which are large and impractical and visually unappealing to students. In

O'Brien's method words are colored according to what part of speech they belong to and the type of phrasal combinations that can be made. The precision with which complicated sentences can be analyzed, in a visually appealing method such as this, is very attractive to those who are looking for a tidy way to discuss sentence forms in their publications on grammar.

However, DOUGHERTY found it extremely difficult using Microsoft Word to imitate the kinds of underlining that O'BRIEN utilizes on his homepage, when preparing for demonstration lessons at university. Invariably the respective lengths of the dotted and dashed underlines became stretched or distorted, making it difficult for the students to distinguish between the printed forms of the two. Undoubtedly, with greater word-processing skills, this would have become possible. It was this rudimentary trouble handling a word-processor program, however that became the inspiration to look for simpler techniques that might be more easily employed in the classroom by students, without requiring them to ask for too much assistance from their teacher, or for the teacher to be a computer savvy technician.

As a result a report surfaced written by Robert Ian Scott (2016), from the Department of English in the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Canada, that describes a system which he adapted for the purpose of teaching sentence structure to first speakers of English aged five and a half. Scott made six-sided blocks of different colors, each with a particular word type so that children could practice making various grammatically correct sentences for themselves, simply by rotating the blocks.

EFL Students of a new language waste a lot of class time or self-study time, having created a sentence, or completed a writing task that has been set for them by their teacher, feeling unsure that their sentences which they have written are grammatically correct or not, or waiting for a teacher to come around in a class and check their work. If students are given a color-code for grammatically correct sentences, they may go ahead and check their sentences against a

color-coded chart and make corrections quickly without waiting for the attention of their teacher. Also this kind of technique lends itself to small group or pair exercises, where students can peer-check their sentences, and be the teachers themselves.

Table SCOTT'S COLOR-CODING SYSTEM

Block Color	The six sides of each block each contain different word sets
Blue (Verbs) Block	See/sees/saw; like/likes/liked; get/gets/got; find/finds/found; point/points/pointed; play/plays/played
Black (Terminal) Block	./!/?
Red (Noun) Block	Sally/Tom/Jack/Bill/Suzy/One Blank Side
Yellow (Adverbial Qualifier) Block	Sometimes; now/then; somewhere; here/there; somehow/one blank side/at home/by you
Red (Noun) Block	Boy/boys; dog/dogs; egg/eggs; girl/girls; horse/horses; one blank side
Orange (Adjective) Block	Big/small; smooth/rough; cold/hot; bright/dark; loud/quiet; sweet/sour
Salmon (Number) Block	No; one/a/the; two; some/the; many; all
Blue Green (Auxiliary) Block	Can/can't; did/didn't; must/mustn't; may/may not; should/should not; will/won't
Pink (Pronoun) Block	I/me; we/us; you; he-she/him-her; it; they/them
White (Conjunction) Block	And; or; but; ; ; ; -
Gray (Subordinate Conjunction) Block	If; because; so; when; where; although

1) Practical Use of Color-Coded Grammar

In March and April of 2017, DOUGHERTY gave two open-campus lessons, and between April of 2017 and February 2018, he visited 3 neighboring high schools to give a demonstration lesson using bilingual (Japanese and English) textbook content written by himself and GENTARO MIYANO (Lecturer of English Osaka University of Tourism). The students gave some feedback from these lessons on a optional questionnaire. Their comments made in the original Japanese and then a translation directly beneath each are as follows: (Some comments with similar content have been omitted to save space).

- 「いろわけしたりしてわかりやすかった！」
- “It was easy to understand by separating [words] by colors.”
- 「授業わかりやすく、楽しく授業ができてよかったです。」
- “I’m glad I could take part in a fun, easily understood class.”
- 「とても分かりやすかったです。短い時間でしたが、ありがとうございました！！」
- “It was very easy to understand. Thank you, even though I felt it was such a short time!!”
- 「意外と楽しめました！また来てください！。。」
- “Surprisingly I was able to enjoy myself! Please come again...”
- 「英語での授業楽しかったです。」
- “The class taught in English was enjoyable.”
- 「日本語がめっちゃ上手かった！」
- “He was so good at Japanese!!”
- 「楽しかった。学校でも、授業でやりたいと思った。」
- “It was fun. I thought I want to do that in my class at school too.”
- 「色で語句の種類を分けるのは難しかったけれど、1つ1つの単語を確認しながら考えることができてもよかった。」
- “It was difficult separating the words into colored phrases, but interesting how it made me check and think about each word.”
- 「楽しかった！！文法学べてよかった。」
- “It was fun. I am happy I could learn about grammar.”

- 「色で区別しながら文をつくってて頭に入りやすかったし、楽しんでできてよかったです。」
- “I understood the idea easily while separating the words into different colors. I was happy that I could enjoy myself.”

a) Activity Style 1 (Used in Open Campus)

Pictures were enlarged and printed on A3 size paper; then stuck onto cardboard. Under each picture was printed a color-coded sentence using O’BRIEN’s color patterns and underline system. Using scissors these were cut into puzzle pieces. Each student was given a color-coded page of blanks where the sentence would normally be. The only information were the dotted or dashed lines and bold lines where words of that color could be written. Once students completed their puzzle with the help of the background picture, they were then able to fill in the words. Some students spontaneously remarked that a certain color was for NOUNS or VERBS, and others. There were three teams working on three different puzzles, and each team raced the others to finish their puzzles first.

b) Activity Style 2 (Based on Demonstration Lesson at High School Visit)

Tasking a sample page from a textbook DOUGHERTY colored these according to colors randomly set for different parts of speech. This was then used as a pdf projected onto the white board. Students listened to the teacher read and mimicked the pronunciation of the words and sentences. The projector was then switched off and students were given blank color paper. They used their memories and did their best to reconstruct the color sequences from memory. One student was allowed to view the screen and give hints to students who wanted them. Also the students asked the teacher. This was naturally harder, but the students at this level were capable of recreating most of the color sequences for themselves. This kind of exercise is appropriate for higher level students.

Table 2 Demonstration Lesson Color-Code

red	verbs
nouns	yellow
articles	dark green
adverbs	orange
prepositions	pink
pronouns	aquamarine

Conclusion

Although this is an incomplete study of the color-coding system, the reaction from the students affords DOUGHERTY the confidence to assume that this is a valid tool for teaching students how to understand correct grammar structures and sentence patterns in English. Also the fact that some students were able to enjoy the technique shows that it can be applied to textbooks and in class activities further.

The author of this research note would like to research further about using this method in combination with translation exercises; educational gaming soft for hand held tablet devices and possibly board games to encourage more development of enjoyable study material.

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