

今日の日本に於ける英語教育に 関する研究ノート

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A brief explanation of the present English teaching situation in Japan

English is considered as of vital importance to Japan in her increasing desire to improve her commercial, intellectual, political and cultural image abroad. However, it has been said that there is no other country in the world besides Japan where, despite the huge amount of money and effort invested in the teaching of English, the results are so meagre.

I introduce briefly the present system of English teaching in Japan.

1. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

a. At the primary school level

English is not taught in Government primary schools although it is being taught in an increasing number of private elementary schools.

b. At the secondary school level

Largely because of the compulsory English paper in the University Entrance Examinations, there appears to be no Government or private secondary schools which do not require their pupils to take English as a subject.

AGE	NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK	
J. H. S. 12—15	General English	3 hours
S. H. S. 15—18	General Course	3 hours
	Advanced Course	5 hours

These figures are subject to variation in different prefectures. In some cases unallocated hours in the school week may be devoted to the study of English at the discretion of the Prefectural Board of Education or the School Governors.

c. At the university level

According to the Ministry of Education in Japan in 1979, there are 1,023 universities, colleges and junior colleges in Japan.

TYPES OF INSTITUTION	SCHOOL			
	TOTAL	NATIONAL	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
TECHNICAL COLLEGES	62	54	4	4
JUNIOR COLLEGES	518	34	49	435
COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES	448	92	33	318

A foreign language (in practice English) is compulsory in the first two years (General Education Course). The number of hours per week varies, and the time is usually divided into periods of 'English' (which may include some literature and translation from English into Japanese commonly known as 'composition') and English conversation which is the Japanese name for any language teaching involving the use of oral English.

In the last two years of the 4-year university course, English language is not compulsory. Many undergraduates who feel they have an incentive to improve their ability in spoken English attend private language schools and often watch or listen to the radio and tv, ELT programs and participate in the activities of the student organised

English Speaking Societies (E. S. S.) which make efforts to make up for university failure to pay sufficient attention to spoken English.

Few lecturers in English literature are interested in the teaching of language, although most have to do some, because literature teaching has the greater prestige.

The typical English literature lecture consists of talking in Japanese about the text under consideration and student participation tends to be limited to exercise in translation. Many university teachers of English literature have limited ability in spoken English, and very few actually give their lectures in English. Most of the larger national universities employ part or full-time foreign teachers to teach classes in spoken English.

d. Commercial English language schools

In view of the fast increasing demand for oral competence in English and inability of the official educational system to satisfy it, special English language schools have sprung up in great numbers throughout Japan, employing thousands of foreigners who—even if not invariably native speakers—can speak English. In addition, large companies and industrial plants run their own English teaching programs or arrange these on a contract basis with commercially run English teaching organizations. Some offer reasonably good language instruction, though most are scarcely more than money making schemes.

2. TEACHING METHODS

Many different teaching methods have been planned, discussed and experimented within English classes at various levels. The following methods are commonly practiced in Japanese schools.

a. Reading-Translation Method

The typical procedure in a class is as follows:

- (1) Teacher's model reading: the teacher reads the text very slowly, word by word, ignoring accent, intonation, and appropriate pauses.
- (2) Students' chorus reading or individual reading in the same manner as the teacher.
- (3) The teacher's or students' translation of the text.
- (4) The teacher's explanation of difficult phrases, sentences, or grammatical rules.

The student taught in this manner may acquire the ability to read English with the help of an English-Japanese dictionary and translate the passage into Japanese; but he is not able to hear, speak or write English properly.

b. Vocabulary Method

This method is frequently used in combination with the reading-and-translation method. Advocates of this method insist that if the student memorizes a long list of vocabulary together with some important grammatical rules, he will be able to translate any English passage into Japanese. Therefore, mastery of English depends upon the size of vocabulary which the learner memorizes.

c. Grammar Method

This method is also commonly used, combined with the reading-translation method and the vocabulary method. The teaching procedure consists of the teacher's explanation of grammatical rules and his analysis of simple sentences.

d. Phonetic Method

This method is based on the concept that language should be taught

as a living speech. The typical procedure of teaching by this method is as follows:

- (1) The teacher presents phonetic symbols (International Phonetic Symbols) and describes each sound represented by the symbols. Pictures and charts are frequently used to indicate the position of tongue, lips, etc.
- (2) The teacher introduces new words, phrases, and sentences in the phonetic symbols.
- (3) The students drill "questions and answers" in English.
- (4) The students practice writing and reading the phonetic symbols.

This method is frequently combined with the direct method introduced by H. Palmer. One of its weaknesses is that it is confusing to learn phonetic symbols before they learn the alphabet, and too much time and effort are spent in reading and writing the phonetic symbols, which are necessary for learning English sounds but which should not be the main activity of teaching.

e. Direct Method

When this method was emphatically recommended by H. Palmer, Head of the Institute for Research in English teaching, the advocates of this method believed that the problem of teaching English was finally solved.

The principle of teaching is as follows:

- (1) Teach English without the medium of Japanese; i, e, no translation of English into Japanese.
- (2) Teach the medium amount of grammar.
- (3) Limit reading to a minimum.

The common classroom procedure is as follows:

- (1) The teacher presents the teaching material in English.
- (2) The teacher explains difficult words and phrases in English.
- (3) There are questions and answers in English, the teacher asks questions based upon the text and students answer them in Eng-

lish, both as a class and individually.

(4) The text is read.

(5) The teacher explains review questions for homework.

Use of this method through speech was extremely limited, because very few teachers in Japan were qualified to conduct classes in English. Students sometimes have to spend more time and effort guessing what a new word or phrase means than acquiring the skill of speech.

The explanation of new patterns of sound and structure should be given on the basis of the differences between Japanese and English.

f. Oral Approach

The “oral approach” along the line described by Charles C. Fries of the University of Michigan has been introduced. Emphasis is placed upon “the mastery of the sound system to understand the system of speech, to hear the distinctive features and to approximate their production,” and “the mastery of the features arrangement that constitute the structure of the language”.

He further insists:

“Accuracy of sound, of rhythm, of intonation, of structural forms and of arrangement within the limited range of expression, must come first and become automatic habit before the student is ready to devote his chief attention to expanding his vocabulary”.

3. EXAMINATIONS

The Japanese education system is characterised by a series of entrance examination from kindergarten to university. Open competition is ensured by a hierarchy of entrance examination hurdles which tend to influence teaching. The teaching then centres on examination to the next step up the educational ladder.

Therefore, the success or failure of an English teacher at the upper secondary school (senior high school) depends on the number of the students he or she can send to prestigious universities.

a. Primary Education

There are no English examinations in primary schools. A few private primary schools enter pupils for the Trinity College in spoken English.

b. Lower Secondary Education

There is no English test for entrance to junior high school.

c. Upper Secondary Education

English in practice is a required subject in the entrance examination to senior high school. The test is usually one set by the Prefectural Board of Education. English teaching in the senior high school is adversely influenced by the university entrance examinations which set a written paper and generally require no evidence of any oral proficiency in the language.

d. Post Secondary Education

Each university in Japan sets its own paper. The types of papers set by universities vary greatly, but a large proportion of them put great emphasis on the translation or comprehension of difficult texts and on knowledge of formal grammar. Some of the papers would be difficult for the average native speaker of English to take. The more enlightened universities, however, are now increasingly setting papers which are of a more modern type and place more emphasis on the comprehension of appropriate modern texts plus essay type question.

e. STEP (The Society for the Testing of English Proficiency)

The STEP tests are sponsored by one of the leading publishing companies in Japan, which is approved by the Ministry of Education, have been conducted twice a year and are taken by approximately 1,000,000

candidates annually. These are examinations in practical English comprehension (written and oral) together with a short oral test. There are four grades (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th). There are more industrial firms interested in hiring the first graders of the tests. An increasing number of students are taking the tests in Japan.

4. SYLLABUSES

The syllabuses of junior and senior high schools are laid down by the Ministry of Education. The objective is to help pupils to achieve a balance of linguistic skills. However, this aim is not generally achieved because of the reasons listed below:

- a. The oral incompetence of the majority of secondary school teachers.
- b. The grammar-translation requirements of the examination system.
- c. Traditional attitudes towards language teaching.
- d. The almost total absence of practical ELT training for graduates intending to become teachers of English.

The senior high school, although benefiting from some improvement in textbooks, greater availability of audio aids, and an increasing proportion of teachers fluent in English, is subject to the requirements of the entrance examinations mentioned above, and also to the considerable pressure parents bring to bear on teachers to concentrate on preparing their children for the examinations.

5. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

There are some 60,000 teachers of English in Japanese schools and 5,000 in universities and colleges. They teach English to some 13 million pupils, but since the average Japanese teacher is lacking in fluency and probably also in reading comprehension, he is not able to develop well the knowledge of English in his students.

Teachers of English in secondary schools are required to have taken a degree incorporating a certain number of credits in required subjects, e.g. English, Educational Administration, the Japanese Constitution,

and teaching practice. The latter is usually of two weeks' duration.

To teach in the schools of any particular prefecture, a teacher must pass that Prefectural Education Board's Qualifying Examination. This is generally a written test.

University teachers of English are not required to have any special teaching diploma but most have taken a post graduate degree in English literature, linguistics or language.

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