acknowledgements

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March 5th, 2017 (Saturday)  Building 8, Waseda University

Learning to Communicate in English through Interactions: Promoting and Prompting Japanese University Students to Ask and Answer Questions in English

JELES-47: the 47th Annual Meeting of the English Language Education Society of Japan

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purpose of this talk

• Do we have research questions?
  – Certainly yes, if it’s a talk on our research results.
    • How correctly can our students produce questions?
    • Does proficiency levels influence / interact with accuracy?
    • What are the causes of this difficulty? Are they important?
  – Maybe not, if it’s a talk on our educational practice.
    • How can we promote our students to ask questions?
    • How can we enhance students’ knowledge and performance?

• integration: dichotomy is only apparently real
  – learning and testing
  – research and education
  – data collection (for research) and practice for learning
need for integration in college-level English language education (and testing) today

• knowledge (grammar / vocabulary) and performance (online processing)
  – disparity between OQPT and VET scores
  – production and reproduction of questions

• integrated tasks in language tests
  – Versant English Test
  – TOEFL iBT

• integration in college curriculum
  – problems inherent in skill-based classes
  – trends in English language textbooks
  – integration of language and computer education
  – integration of language and liberal arts education
significance of simultaneous learning

• effectiveness of project-based learning
  – hour of comprehensive study in the new study outline
    ➔ Students today love group work.
  – cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary learning
  – importance of project management skills

• necessity for learning methodology / tools / contents at the same time
  – calculus and mechanics / R and statistics
  – prolog and logic / logic programming and feature-based syntax and semantics
  – learning English to learning in English

• avoid proliferation of courses
  – no need for omnibus courses
  – reduction of courses
three major roles English teachers are expected to perform in Japanese college education today

• enhance students’ English proficiency (exit requirement)
  – what kinds of skills and/or proficiency needed?
    • reading / writing / listening / speaking
    • fluency / accuracy / logic / persuasion
    • pragmatics / socio-linguistic factors / awareness of BA

• enhance students’ general academic skills
  – integrate available information and think critically
  – write logically / speak persuasively
  – learn to quote and cite and give proper references
  – learn to use computers and networks

• enhance students’ general interactive skills
  – College students are afraid if they can make friends.
  – too afraid to take chances and talk to each other
Effective communication results in continued and successful exchange of questions and answers.

Successful learners must be ready to form and utter questions on the fly.

Students must be promoted and prompted to produce questions in interactive environments.
Why is it so important to be able to ask complex and accurate questions in English communication?

• challenges: global human resource development initiatives in Japan

• introduction or adoption of four-skills tests for college entrance and beyond

• acquisition of communicative competence ➔ one of the most important objectives of English language learning / education in Japan
  - as set forth by MEXT
  - in the recognition of teachers and students

• asking the right question at the right time: ➔ an integral part of oral interactions.

• “communicative approaches” ➔ less training in grammar
approaches to improve students’ question formation (1st year)

• oral response practice: exposure to 300 questions twice in 30 class sessions over a year
  – groups of three with a video camera and 10 question cards and peer evaluation forms 30 times a year
  – questioner: reads one question card aloud twice
  – respondent: 10 seconds to think and 45 seconds to answer
  – time-keeper: keeps time and video record
  – respondent and time keeper evaluates
  – change roles with the next question card
  – everyone writes a 500 word essay in 30 minutes
spring semester of 1st-year students

- shift and rotate seat assignment
- submission of homework and activity record:
  essays: topic / length / time to finish
  extensive reading: pages read / time spent
- oral response practice
- essay writing / essay review and revision
- watching CNN / EnglishCentral / STO dictation
- questions: reproduction / conversion / circle tasks
- homework
  - completion of essay / revision
  - extensive reading with graded readers / chapter books / picture books
fall semester of 1\textsuperscript{st}-year students

• shift and rotate seat assignment
• submission of homework and activity record:
  essays: topic / length / time to finish
  extensive reading: pages read / time spent
• oral response practice
• small-group presentations on topics discussed
• essay writing / essay review and revision
• watching CNN / EnglishCentral / STO dictation
• questions: reproduction / conversion / circle tasks
• homework
  – completion of essay / revision
  – extensive reading with graded readers / chapter books / picture books
self-evaluation

• can read one graded reader book / chapter book / picture book in one week
• can write a 400- / 300- / 200-word essay in half hour
• can start responding to a question in 10 seconds
• can keep responding to a question for 45 seconds
• can respond to a question coherently
• can respond to a question with examples or reasons
• can respond to a question with reasonable eye-contact / smile
approaches to improve students’ question formation (1st year)

• oral response practice: exposure to 300 questions twice in 30 class sessions over a year
  – groups of three with a video camera and 10 question cards and peer evaluation forms 30 times a year
  – questioner: reads one question card aloud twice
  – respondent: 10 seconds to think and 45 seconds to answer
  – time-keeper: keeps time and video record
  – respondent and time keeper evaluates
  – change roles with the next question card
  – everyone writes a 500 word essay in 30 minutes
pedagogical findings after the facts

• importance of audience for authentic communication
  – Students read the question aloud to be answered.
  – Students respond to be heard and understood.

• inherent information gap
  – Respondents are not to look at question cards.
  – Responses are personal experiences and opinions.

• game-like setting and recording devices as scaffolding
  – realistic constraints such as response time
  – easier than ordinary pair activity

• Japanese students low in communicative competence
approaches to improve students’ question formation (1st year)

• video jam session
  – everyone watches video clips of their own choice on CNN web site
  – 2 or 3 pages of PowerPoint slides in 5 min.
  – presentations within groups of four (or less)
  – each student is expected to pose at least one question for one presentation
  – video record the entire interactions
approaches to improve students’ question formation (1st year fall)

• small group presentations
  – several pages of PowerPoint slides based on immediately preceding oral response practice
  – presentations within groups of four (or less)
  – each student pose one question for one presentation
  – video record the interaction
reality check: our methodology

- Three tests, with Tera bytes of language data:
  1. Versant English Test (spoken English)
  2. Versant Writing Test (written English)
  3. Oxford Quick Placement Test

- Freshman students at Waseda University

- Administered Versant four times and OQPT three times in academic year 2015-2016
  - April, July, October*, December
Versant English Test

- Spoken English Test, 17 minutes
- Automated scoring with ASR
- Optimized for English learner speech patterns including Japanese learners of English
- Overall + four subscores
  - Sentence Mastery
  - Vocabulary
  - Fluency
  - Pronunciation
Versant English Test

- High frequency vocabulary in conversation (Most frequent 8,000 words in Switchboard Corpus)
- Relatively simple structures and expressions
- Items recorded at natural conversation pace by amateur native English speakers
- Focus on the ability to “listen, then speak” in real-time (=facility in spoken English)
- Psycholinguistic approach
Versant Writing Test

• Written English Test, ~40 minutes
• Automated scoring with Latent Semantic Analysis
• Overall + four subscores
  – Grammar
  – Vocabulary
  – Organization
  – Voice & Tone
  – Reading Comprehension
Oxford Quick Placement Test

- Paper and pencil version (CD-ROM version includes listening)
- Focuses on Vocab, Grammar, Usage
- 30 minutes, 60 multiple choice items (max 60 points)
- Recommended to be combined with speaking and writing test
- Concordance with CEFR levels

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The relation of the VET, VWT, and OQPT to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VET</th>
<th>VWT</th>
<th>OQPT</th>
<th>CEFR level</th>
<th>CEFR level description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>79-80</td>
<td>77-80</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Mastery (Upper advanced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-78</td>
<td>67-76</td>
<td>48-54</td>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Effective proficiency (Lower advanced)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58-68</td>
<td>54-66</td>
<td>40-47</td>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Vantage (Upper intermediate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47-57</td>
<td>44-53</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Threshold (Lower intermediate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-46</td>
<td>30-43</td>
<td>18-29</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Waystage (Elementary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>10-17</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Breakthrough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>&lt;A1</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Beginner)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Versant Descriptive Statistics (Overall)

N = 53; Only freshman students who had both VET and VWT scores all four times

## Versant English Test (VET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VET</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>38.89</td>
<td>41.47</td>
<td>40.57</td>
<td>42.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Versant Writing Test (VWT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VWT</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>41.45</td>
<td>44.08</td>
<td>44.51</td>
<td>47.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>7.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For both VET and VWT, the differences in mean scores between April and December are statistically significant (p<0.01)
# Mapping VET scores to CEFR levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>19 (35.8%)</td>
<td>9 (17.0%)</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
<td>6 (11.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>27 (50.9%)</td>
<td>36 (67.9%)</td>
<td>36 (67.9%)</td>
<td>35 (66.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>7 (13.2%)</td>
<td>6 (11.3%)</td>
<td>7 (13.2%)</td>
<td>11 (20.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=53

April-September: More than 80% is A1 and A2
December: Changed to A2 and B1
## Mapping VWT scores to CEFR levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>32 (60.4%)</td>
<td>22 (41.5%)</td>
<td>21 (39.6%)</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>16 (30.2%)</td>
<td>25 (47.2%)</td>
<td>23 (43.4%)</td>
<td>30 (56.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>2 (3.8%)</td>
<td>5 (9.4%)</td>
<td>7 (13.2%)</td>
<td>10 (18.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

April-Sept: More than 80% is A2 and B1
December: B1 is more than 55%; A1 and B1 are the same number

N=53
Oxford Quick Placement Test
Descriptive Statistics

The same 53 freshman students.
April: One student did not take OXPT
December: 3 students did not take OQPT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April (N=52)</th>
<th>July (N=53)</th>
<th>December (N=50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>37.08</td>
<td>38.06</td>
<td>38.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>6.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Mapping OQPT scores to CEFR levels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CEFR</th>
<th>April (N=52)</th>
<th>July (N=53)</th>
<th>December (N=50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>7 (13.5%)</td>
<td>4 (7.5%)</td>
<td>3 (6.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>25 (48.1%)</td>
<td>25 (47.2%)</td>
<td>27 (54.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>19 (36.5%)</td>
<td>21 (39.6%)</td>
<td>16 (32.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>1 (1.9%)</td>
<td>3 (5.7%)</td>
<td>4 (8.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

April-December: B1 and B2 have more than 80% of the students
Thank you for your attention.

Any QUESTIONS?

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