

# PRINCIPLES AND METHODS OF COMMUNICATION PRACTICE

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(Received on 31 October 1977)

## 0 Aim of This Paper

In this paper I discuss the principles and methods of communication practice in the light of the recent trends in foreign language teaching, considering its implications for the teaching of English in Japan and its applicability to language lab work.

## 1 Theoretical Background

As I pointed out in one of my previous papers,<sup>1)</sup> many teachers of English have recently felt that communicative as well as manipulative activities should be incorporated into the English classroom. This need is considerably greater in the classroom situation in Japan, which "provides the only opportunity for the student to really *use* his English."<sup>2)</sup> It is no wonder, therefore, that the current courses of study for junior and senior high schools issued by the Education Ministry of Japan put more emphasis on 'language activities' than on 'learning activities.'

What is the background of this change, then? When the audio-lingual approach was in vogue, it was vaguely assumed that through structure-based drills the students would acquire automatic language habits and thus be able to communicate. This habit-formation theory, however, has been seriously challenged by generative grammarians for the last two decades. According to Chomsky, the founder of the theory of transformational generative grammar, "Language is not a 'habit-structure.' Ordinary linguistic behavior characteristically involves innovation, formation of new sentences and new patterns in accordance with rules of great abstractness and intricacy."<sup>3)</sup> Thus he continually emphasizes "creative and innovative use of language."<sup>4)</sup>

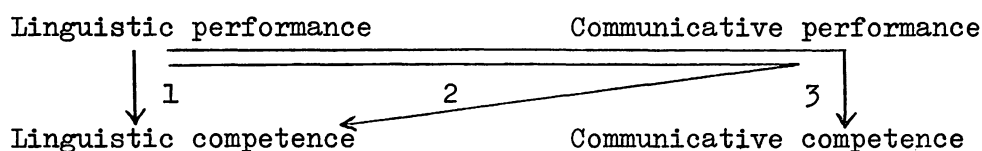
It is apparent that this challenge has eventually led to the current trend toward communication. However, the process of this change has not been a direct one. It needed criticism from some socio- and psycholinguists against Chomsky's dichotomy of 'competence' and 'performance.'<sup>5)</sup>

Hymes, for example, argues that Chomsky's theory of competence "posits ideal objects in abstraction from sociocultural features that might enter into their description."<sup>6)</sup> He calls attention to the fact that a child "acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner."<sup>7)</sup> He names this kind of competence

'communicative competence' to distinguish it from Chomsky's narrower notion of an ideal speaker-hearer. Campbell and Wales describe this broader notion as "the ability to produce or understand utterances which are not so much grammatical *but*, more important, *appropriate to the context in which they are made.*" 8)

This term has recently been used in the field of language teaching—in some cases in a slightly different sense. Rivers, for example, equates it with "spontaneous expression" 9)—i. e., the ability to carry out linguistic interaction in the target language.

Paulston discusses these two notions, arguing that there are more important implications for language teaching in using the term in Hymes' sense to refer to the social rules of language use.<sup>10)</sup> She suggests the following model for language teaching: <sup>11)</sup>



Here, she adds the term 'communicative performance' to mean "communicative activities which lack specific deep structures of social meaning," which are only possible "in the artificial world of language classrooms." <sup>12)</sup> This roughly agrees with River's notion.

In Paulston's contention the three strategies given in the above model are numbered in order of increasing efficiency in language teaching. Ideally I agree with her view that "the most efficient language teaching follows Strategy 3," <sup>13)</sup> but I am dubious about its appropriateness and feasibility in some teaching situations—specifically in the elementary and intermediate stages of Japanese schools, where English is taught as a *foreign* language. There is an important difference between *our* situation and the *second* language situation, especially in the intermediate stages, as Stratton remarks.<sup>14)</sup> Paulston herself refers to the special importance of the necessity to develop communicative competence in second language and second dialect teaching. <sup>15)</sup>

I share Finocchiaro's view that what is important in the language program is to "take into account the cognitive and sociocultural needs of the students, the community in which the school is located, the training, language ability, and personality of the teacher, and the present and foreseeable future needs of the society in which our learners are living or plan to live." <sup>16)</sup> It is more appropriate to *our* situation, at least in terms of expression, to "prepare realistic activities that are relevant to the pupils' everyday life and communication needs"<sup>17)</sup> than to draw their attention to "deviant social meaning"<sup>18)</sup> This view is not inconsistent with Paulston's, for she states that "the implications for language teaching that we can draw from the notions of commu-

nicative competence apply primarily to situations where the learners live in the country of the target language."<sup>19)</sup>

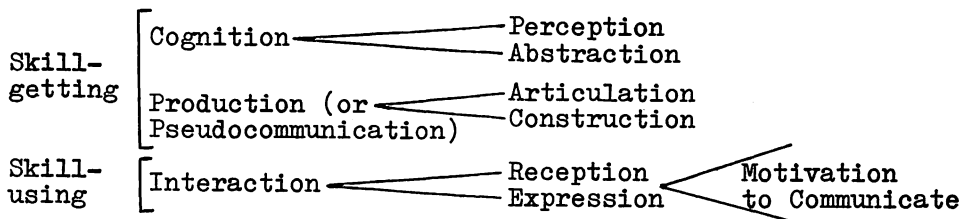
Our feasible goal at the moment, then, is the development of 'communicative competence' in Rivers' sense, which is closer to Strategy 2 in Paulston's model in that it is designed to combine "skill-getting exercises.....with skill-using activities."<sup>20)</sup> In this paper I am discussing 'communication practice' in this context.

## 2 Methodological Suggestions

Let's now turn our attention to River's view. She remarks, "Our failure in the past has been in our satisfaction with students who perform well in pseudo-communication."<sup>21)</sup> To remedy this failure, she suggests two levels of language behavior: <sup>22)</sup>

- (1) the level of *manipulation* of language elements that occur in fixed relationships in clearly defined closed systems.....
- (2) a level of *expression of personal meaning* at which possible variations are infinite, depending on such factors as the type of message to be conveyed, the situation in which the utterance takes place, the relationship between speaker and hearer or hearers, and the degree of intensity with which the message is conveyed.

She gives the following list as a model of the teaching (learning) procedure at these levels.<sup>23)</sup>



Prator elaborates on this point, suggesting that it may be helpful to divide classroom activities into at least four major groups: <sup>24)</sup>

- (1) completely manipulative
- (2) predominantly manipulative
- (3) predominantly communicative
- (4) completely communicative

Thus students are expected to move gradually along this carefully arranged manipulation-communication scale toward free expression. Examples of each activity would be:

- (1) (a) mere repetition
- (b) simple substitution

- (2) controlled question-and-answer drill
- (3) freer question-and-answer drill
- (4) free conversation

Yet, he suggests that even into type (1) "the teacher can introduce an element of communication"<sup>25)</sup> and change it into type (2). For example, in (1)(a) he can allow "a significant period of time to elapse between the hearing of the model and the attempt at imitation"<sup>26)</sup>—i. e., delayed repetition. And in (1)(b), given a model sentence such as *My father is a doctor*, "the students could individually substitute the name of their father's real profession."<sup>27)</sup> The teacher could also "cue the exercise visually, by means of a series of pictures, instead of cuing it orally."<sup>28)</sup>

In this way drills can be made meaningful and stimulating even at the elementary stage. As Rivers remarks, it would be a mistake to believe that practice at the communicative level "should be delayed until the student has learned all the common features of the manipulative type."<sup>29)</sup>

### 3 Psychological Considerations

3. 1 Unlike conventional pattern drills, communication practice should be cognitive-oriented, making the students imaginative and mentally alert. Here is an example of that type presented by William Rutherford at the 1973 convention of the TESOL organization :<sup>30)</sup>

*Teacher* : I'm thinking of taking a trip, but I don't want to go to Europe this time. I think I'll go to Spain and Portugal instead.

*Student* : Spain is in Europe, and so is Portugal.

*Teacher* : What countries border on Spain besides Germany and Belgium?

*Student* : Germany doesn't border on Spain, and neither does Belgium.

*Teacher* : My first stop is Madrid, but I haven't decided whether to go there by boat or by plane.

*Student* : The plane goes to Madrid, but the boat doesn't.

3. 2 What often comes into question in conducting communication practice is how to remove the student's shyness and embarrassment. This is especially a vital issue in a society like Japan, where silence has traditionally been considered to be golden. But I am beginning to feel through my teaching experience that an embarrassing atmosphere often seen in our classroom is a fabricated one rather than intrinsic in our culture. It is mostly attributable to the authoritarian attitude of a teacher. Rivers rightly points it out when she states :

In most classrooms there is very little reason or opportunity for students or teachers to reveal themselves to each other : the relationship is a formal and formalized one for which conventionalists suffice. The teacher is

there to teach ; the student is there to learn what the teacher or the administration thinks he should learn.<sup>31)</sup>

To remedy this situation she suggests :

We need an attitude which allows the student to learn, that waits for the student to learn, that allows the student choices in what he shall learn.<sup>32)</sup>

In order to foster this atmosphere, it would be better not to correct "a student's errors during a communication exercise,"<sup>33)</sup> as Cole suggests. We cannot pay too much attention to "the crucial role of 'learner factors' in language acquisition and to the importance of knowing just what the learner contributes to the learning process so that it can be taken into account in the teaching process,"<sup>34)</sup> as Jakobovits asserts.

#### 4 Applicability to Language Lab Work

4. 1 In the light of the suggestions mentioned above, communication practice is likely to be incompatible with language lab work. The facility itself is originally oriented to the formation of language habits with classical audio-lingual methods as its background. There has been considerable agreement, therefore, that we should limit its use to manipulative activities, leaving communicative activities for post-lab sessions in the classroom.

Yet, we tend to lose sight of this overall picture, ending oral practice at the manipulative stage in the lab. It is certainly true that "some instructors unfortunately are not quite sure where the goal is or how best to get there."<sup>35)</sup> What makes a natural transition from manipulation to communication so difficult? Here are a couple of possible causes.

- (1) A "schizophrenic situation"<sup>36)</sup> — caused by a large gap between conventional rigid and mechanical drills and spontaneous interaction practice.
- (2) Oversized class—even by introducing group work, the problem of 'buzzes' still remains.

It is clear that the conventional type of lab is not an appropriate situation for communication practice, but it is a pity that such advantages of the lab as intensified individual instruction and ample practice time should not be made effective when the practice is conducted in the classroom. Isn't it possible to reconsider the concept of the language lab in terms of both hardware and software so that the whole system of an oral English course may aim at the development of communicative competence? Here are my suggestions.

- (1) In terms of software, we can make the transition more natural and smooth by making lab drills more stimulating and meaningful, as is shown in 3.1, or by sometimes introducing such an unconventional drill as has "more than one possible answer"<sup>37)</sup> to "provide variety,"<sup>38)</sup> or an 'open dialog,' in which the students are "encouraged to give answers according to

their own experience."<sup>39)</sup>

- (2) In terms of hardware, the introduction of visual aids—the most sophisticated one being a video system—is recommended. It makes a situational context more vivid and realistic. Also recommended is an inter-booth communication system,<sup>40)</sup> which makes communication practice possible inside the language lab,<sup>41)</sup> thus solving the problem of an oversized class.

4. 2 Now, I am going to describe our own program, which is being tried along the lines mentioned above. Being a five-year system college which admits junior high school graduates, our college provides an English curriculum composed of comprehensive and oral English courses at the intermediate level. What I am mentioning here specifically is the oral English course for the first-year students, which is conducted twice a week in the language laboratory.

With the development of communicative competence as our aim, I once adopted the plan in which "one group does lab work in the booths, while the other half uses the back space, where there are no booths, to do communication practice under my supervision."<sup>42)</sup> The students changed places in the middle of the class hour. But even in this plan, the group size is 20, which is not small enough. Besides, it deprives the teacher of monitoring the students' lab work, which is supposed to be one of the most important functions of the language laboratory.

So, in 1975, when we had a chance to remodel the facilities, we introduced an inter-booth communication equipment called 'group conversation unit,' which is designed for a group—composed of 6—or a pair to speak with each other without being interrupted by other groups or pairs. Later that year we were allowed to add a video system in the lab room. After my return from a year's study at the University of Sydney, we started the following plan in 1977 by making use of the newly-introduced equipment.

| <i>Hour</i>                             | <i>Procedure</i>                                | <i>Hardware in Use</i>                                   |
|---|---|--|
| 1st Hour                                | Presentation                                    | VTR  |
|   | *Mim-mem<br>Practice                            | Recording<br> <br>Playback<br>VTR<br>Booth Recorder      |
| 2nd Hour                                | Dialog &<br>Question-<br>and-Answer<br>Practice | Recording<br> <br>Playback<br>VTR & TR<br>Booth Recorder |
|   | Application<br>Dialog<br>Practice               | GCU (=Group<br>Conversa-<br>tion Unit)                   |
| 1st Hour of<br>the Follow-<br>ing Cycle | *Performance                                    | Front Space<br>of Lab Room                               |
|   | Testing   | Speaker  |

The basic material used for this plan is the NHK TV English conversation program, Step I. Several revisions of this plan have been made through trial and error. The asterisked items are some of them. The material is in the form of a skit, which, as Shak believes, fulfills the foremost requirements for language learning, i. e., "adequate exposure to language situations and chances to use language."<sup>43)</sup>

Another revision we made is the inclusion in the taped material of some transitional skits relevant to the everyday situations of our students. These skits are being used as the link from the original skit to the application dialog practice, which has become easier since this revision.

After the playback time, we switch the lab so that GCU may work, monitor the students and sometimes give them hints or take part in their conversation. I am often surprised at the ingenuity and the sense of humor they show then and in the performance after that. I am realizing the truth of Rivers' words that "if you lack imagination, learn to involve that of your students."<sup>44)</sup>

## 5 What Remains to Be Discusd

For want of space, the details of our language lab program will be given on another occasion, together with some examples of the process of the diminishing control of oral practice. We recognize that the program itself needs some more revisions, which we will try to make along the lines discussed in this paper. Such notions as Jakobovits' "transactional engineering analysis"<sup>45)</sup> and a "functional syllabus,"<sup>46)</sup> on which I need to do more research, are also likely to give us valuable insights and suggestions for the compilation and adaptation of teaching materials for communication practice.

Let me emphasize here, however, that what is needed most for material adaptation is the ingenuity and creativity on the part of the individual teacher. This is what Slager suggests when he states that the teacher "is ultimately responsible for adapting each lesson to meet the specific needs and interests of his students."<sup>47)</sup> Let's make the best use of this creative role in our teaching whether in the classroom or in the language laboratory.

### *Acknowledgements*

This paper is based on the two reports I made—one at a seminar on TEFL at the University of Sydney, Australia, on 26 July 1976, and the other at the 16th Annual Convention of the Language Laboratory Association of Japan, held at Aichi Hall, Nagoya, Japan, on 3 August 1977—with some additions and revisions made afterward. I would like to express my deep gratitude to all those concerned on these occasions for valuable comments and suggestions, and to Professor Ichio Harimaya, one of my colleagues at Akita Technical College,

for his collaboration on our present language lab program.

**Notes :**

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