

Class Observation by the Use of COLT- Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching and the Application of Corrective Feedback in English classroom at one of the Schools in Japan

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Abstract

In this paper, how the corrective feedback was used in the classroom is analyzed. The teaching-learning procedures of Junior High School (second graders) was observed by the observation checklist (COLT Part A & B) and analyzed on the acquisition of four skills of English. According to the data analysis, the teacher's provision of corrective feedback is partially seen. How the corrective feedback contributes to second language acquisition is highlighted in the study. Recasts are the effective feedback to reformulate the students' errors immediately without explicitly indicating the errors. It is essential that the students receive necessary proper corrective feedback from the teachers in acquiring target language.

Keywords: COLT, Four skills, Corrective feedback, Recast, Second language acquisition

I Introduction

The acquisition of communication skills is becoming one of the most important purposes of learning English in Japan. Japanese English language education has gone through drastic changes as the country itself has changed. Not only the curricula and textbooks have been revised but also the effective instructional methods are being used which are emphasizing at all four skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening. The communicative teaching method is being used which aims to make communicative competence of target language and develops procedures for teaching the four skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It encourages activities that involve real communication and carry out meaningful tasks. Teachers are expected to be an organizer, a guide, and a counselor.

However, the conditions for learning differ in terms of the physical environment, the age and motivation of the students, the amount of time available for learning, language teaching methods and techniques of teachers and many other variables. Receiving feedback from teachers is also essential to achieve the language learning goal.

II The Present Study

1 Class observation and data analysis

The English teaching-learning process of Junior High School (second graders) at Nagoya Junior High School Affiliated to Aichi University of Education had been observed by the use of COLT - Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995). The referenced textbook is *New Horizon English Course II* and the class time was 50 minutes.

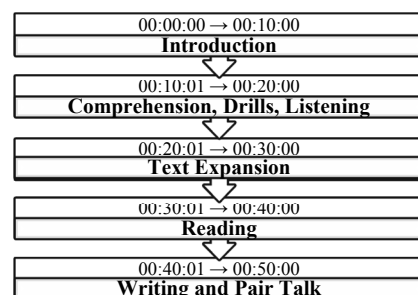


Figure 1: Teaching-learning procedures

The data collected by using COLT, Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching, has been analyzed mainly focusing on “Participant Organization” (T ↔ S/C, S ↔ S/C, Choral, Group Task, Individual Task) and on “Student Modality” (Listening, Speaking,

Reading, Writing). By referencing to the observation checklist COLT, the teacher spent 20 % (10 minutes) of the fifty minutes on comprehension tasks and also 20 % (10 minutes) for the text expansion. The instructions were mostly done in L2 (i.e. English) and L1 is used when the more detailed clarification was needed.

When analyzing the student modality data which is how the students got an access to four skills, the percentage values are as follows:

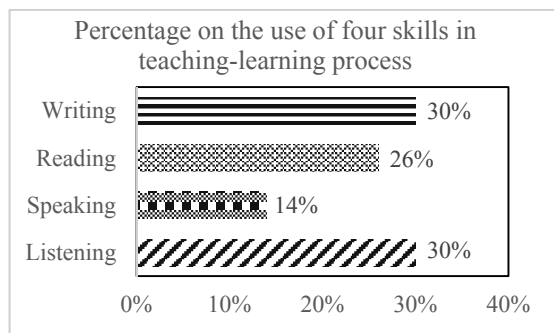


Figure 2: Percentage on the use of four skills in teaching-learning process

For the participant organization data, it is found that

- Teacher’s interaction with the whole class (T ↔ S/C) is 25.9 % (12:58 minutes)
- Students’ interaction with the students/class (S ↔ S/C) is 27.9 % (13:56 minutes)
- Students’ participation in choral is 15.9% (7:58 minutes) of the entire class time and the rests are individual work (writing tasks).

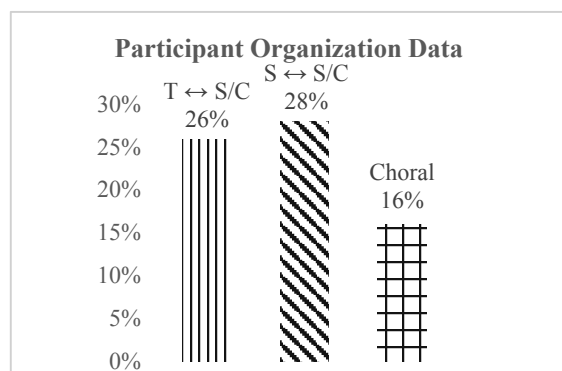


Figure 3: Percentage on participant organization

For the communicative oriented classrooms, how much the students can do output in communication is important. Speaking lasted 7 minutes within 50 minutes of

the class time. For the second language learners, it can be said that it is quite enough even though it is lesser than the time-span for other skills. Because the students had also to reproduce what they had learned by constructing own sentences to extend the passage. To scaffold the students with all the four skills on balance within a period of class time is difficult to conduct because of limited time available. The amount of teacher’s interaction to the whole class and the students’ peer interaction were almost equal. Because of around 40 students of class size, group work activities were difficult to conduct but pair work could be done easily as the students’ seating arrangement was in pairs. In this way, students’ peer interaction could be done in sufficient amount of time.

The COLT - Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme (Part B) analysis focuses on the verbal output and interactions of teacher and students (Gaynor, Dunn & Terdal, 1997). According to the categories from the observation checklist (Part B of COLT scheme), teacher’s and learner’s verbal interactions could be analyzed. The teacher mostly used L2 and used L1 when the clarification of the information is needed. Most of the questions asked by the teacher were genuine. Focusing on form was not seen.

The teacher began the lesson with a short conversation.

T: “This morning, Mr. A said that キャラ設定 (configuration-characteristics) is not good. I want to talk about my opinion. I agree with his opinion because many of you call me “tomato”. When you call me “tomato”, I feel sad every time. And after school when I go home, I cry every time. So, we shouldn’t do it, I think.”

The students called a nickname “tomato” to their English male-teacher. It was named after his pinky face. For the teacher, he is embarrassed to be called “tomato” and he tells his true opinion to the students. It is assumed that the teacher built a *genuine interaction* with his students rather than a typical or traditional classroom communication.

As the second language classroom, there were many errors in the learners’ utterances. Those included both grammatical and pronunciation errors. Teacher’s corrective feedback could be very helpful during oral

work. Types of feedback teacher gave on errors and students' uptakes are analyzed. For the corrective feedback by the teacher, no explicit feedback was profoundly provided. The learners did not notice their errors and what the correct forms were.

When the teacher asked for the students' opinion and one student replied:

Excerpt 1

- S: I think dif. fi. cult.
T: Difficult?
S: Yes. It is not easy for me.
T: Ohh..okay. It's difficult for you.

When the student replied, "*I think difficult,*" the pronunciation of the student was difficult to know that it was "difficult." The teacher repeated "*Difficult?*" to clarify student's answer. The teacher repeated again "*It's difficult for you?*", it could be said that the teacher used *repetition* and *recast* as to reformulate the student's erroneous sentences. And the teacher clarified student's answer in Japanese and asked her "*So, you agree with that opinion?*" In that case, it could be said that *clarification request* was used but here *explicit correction* or *elicitation* or *metalinguistic feedback* was needed. The teachers can give more information or ask more questions to get complete and correct sentence from the student.

The teacher asked for another students' opinion:

Excerpt 2

- T: Please give me the reason why you disagree with this opinion.
S: Mr. AA (Mr. AA refers to the teacher) said, if you said (*error*) Mr. Tomato, I'm sad (*error*).
T: Yes.
S: I think, actually, you are happy.

In this excerpt, the errors student made can be clearly seen and the teacher should provide corrective feedback immediately to notify the student with the erroneous parts of the statement. *Metalinguistic error correction* could be done here like:

- S:, if you said (*error*) Mr. Tomato, I'm sad (*error*).
T: I said when people called me Mr. Tomato, so you have to use "if you are called Mr. Tomato (*correction*), you feel sad (*correction*)."

Metalinguistic correction can be operationalized for the grammatical explanations and the correct forms of the student's ungrammatical utterances can also be pointed out.

The teacher asked one student what she did on 3-day holiday:

Excerpt 3

- T: Where did you go?
S: I went to Toyohashi.
T: Why did you go there?
S: I saw Tezutsu Hanabi.

The student's answer to the teacher's question of "*Why did you go there?*" was "*I saw the Tezutsu Hanabi.*" Here, the teacher's corrective feedback could be noticeably done to the student's erroneous answer to "*Why*" question. *Elicitation* could be done to directly elicit the correct form from the student and to reformulate the utterance like "*You went to Toyohashi to*" or "*You went to Toyohashi because*"

Excerpt 4

- T: BB san, please read the sentences you have written.
S: (The student read.)
"I live in Kumamoto City in Kyushu. Kyushu is in the southwest of Japan. My city is famous for Kumamoto Castle. Do you know Kumamoto Castle? (the sentence made by student) Kumamoto Castle is popular because there are some interesting place. (the sentence made by student) For example, main place.....main palace. (*student corrected the error by herself*) There are beautiful rooms, a great kitchen, a simple tea room, and so on. You can learn about history there. If you are interested, you will come there. (the sentence made by student)"

Some errors can be found in the sentences made by the student. The student mistakenly pronounced "*palace*" "*place*" but self-correction was done as soon as the student noticed the error. For the other errors, corrective feedbacks were not provided by the teacher. It might be because the teacher did not

notice the errors or the teacher did not need the accuracy of the forms from the student and those errors were thought as the minor errors which could be neglected or because of time-restriction.

In this observation, it is seen that the teacher used *recast* other than the other types of corrective feedback. For the rest of the lesson, the teacher's explicit corrective feedback could not be found even though students were making form and pronunciation erroneous utterances. Corrective feedback is a crucial means to treat learners' errors in second language classroom. If teacher's corrective feedback might interrupt the students' communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form, providing feedback could be done after the students' conversation. The more clear and explicit feedback the students receive, the more effective second language learning.

Research has shown that recasts are the most frequently used type of corrective feedback. Corrective feedback has been widely discussed for second language acquisition and although it is suggested that applying corrective feedback in communicating classrooms is effective, it is still not widely used by the teachers. As the second language classrooms, students will undoubtedly make erroneous statements in using correct forms of words or verbs, pronunciation or word order.

Yoshida (2010) mentioned that the teachers occasionally avoided providing further feedback to those learners they perceived as less capable to avoid causing further confusing or feelings of inadequacy, or when they simply did not have the time to do so. The corrective feedback enables students to identify the differences between their inputs and outputs. Corrective feedback serves as a way of informing and guiding the students on how to avoid grammatical errors (Rassaei & Ahmad, 2011; Rezaei, Mozaffar & Hatf, 2011). However, the effectiveness of corrective feedback in the acquisition of L2 depends on motivation of the students, the amount of correction offered by the teachers, how well the students notice their errors and understand the correct forms.

As Ellis, Loewen & Erlam (2006, p. 340) stated, corrective feedback is 'responses to learner utterances containing an error' and it may consist of an indication of the existence of an error and providing the correct form of the target language. Corrective feedback is among

the techniques which are believed to facilitate L2 development by providing learners with both positive and negative evidence (Long, 1996; Gunduz, 2004).

To provide feedback, noticing the learners' errors is firstly essential. There is a situation to be considered - to use as soon as the errors are noticed or after the conversation has finished. Corrective feedback should be provided immediately as soon as the teachers notice the learners' errors. No sooner had the learners noticed the teachers' feedback than they could be able to correct their erroneous statements into the correct forms promptly. Some of the teachers prefer to provide corrective feedback after the conversation of the students are engaging is finished as they think that it might interrupt the students' communication. When the corrective feedback is delayed, it can alter students' perceptions on corrective feedback the students would not recognize their errors. Therefore, when to give corrective feedback depends on the teachers' perceptions.

Yoshida (2008) found that teachers choose the types of corrective feedback depending on the individual learners' differences such as their learning style and their language development levels (i.e., grammatical & listening areas). There are some reasons or situation why some teachers do not use quite enough of proper corrective feedback. Breen (2001) claimed that teachers correct errors based on the learner's language ability, flexibility, and emotional state and that a learner's self-esteem can be affected by the teacher's response. In that case, some of the teachers might be reluctant to provide feedback as they might think that it may hurt students' self-esteem or will have an impact on their motivation.

Some of the teachers might use feedback in general but not specific when they think the time duration is not sufficient enough for the necessary feedback. Some of the teachers might not expect the students' complete accuracy and so they avoid to use explicit feedback. A controversial issue of whether providing feedback should be done or neglected is the same as the issue of when to use. Neglecting minor errors might not be a hindrance in students' conversation but students might be unable to notice of their errors and would not get the accuracy and correct forms of the forms they used.

In vice versa, when teachers provide feedback to each and every form of errors the students have made, it could lead to a negative effect on learners' attitudes and perceptions on teacher's feedback (Goo & Takeuchi, in press). Therefore, considering the frequency of teachers' corrective feedback in classes is also of paramount importance. The right balance in regarding the amount of using corrective feedback is a profound matter not only to become an efficient and effective second language classroom but also to scaffold the students with the fluency and accuracy of the language. Giving feedback in the classroom during the second language learning process will improve the expected learning outcomes or target of the lesson.

Most of the teachers are prone to use recasts frequently in their classrooms than the other types of corrective feedback. It might be because of recast is the easiest way to provide the prompt feedback without directly indicating that the students' utterances were incorrect, without much hinderance to the students' utterances and without affecting much to the students' negative perceptions on teacher's feedbacks. The teacher can implicitly reformulate the students' errors. Unlike recast, the teacher has to clearly indicate that the students' utterances were incorrect and have to provide the correct form when they use the explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic or clarification requests. And time restrictions either could be one of the factors that make teachers skip providing feedback sometimes.

All in all, implicit feedback like recasts are at least should be provided immediately once the errors are noticed. As the second language learners seem to fear making mistakes in using and speaking English, it is undoubtedly true that they have the language anxiety. Implicit feedback could make students at ease of that anxiety when making errors or mistakes of the target language. Implicit feedback could help teachers avoid from drawing overt attention to the learners' mistakes. The less anxiety students have, the more they will participate in communicating activities using target language. And the more the target language are used, the more fluency and accuracy would be obtained. Therefore, implicit feedback is effective to reach an expected teaching-learning goal of second language acquisition.

The effectiveness of corrective feedback may depend on the factors of how well the teachers can notice the learners' errors and provide the suitable corrections, how well the learners notice the corrections of the teachers, the ability of the learners to differentiate between the errors they made and the teachers' corrections, and how well they can repair their uptakes.

2 Rating Part A of COLT

Spada & Fröhlich (1995) provide guidelines for calculating the global score which enables to provide an overall picture of the communicative orientation. A global score was calculated using some features from Part A of COLT i.e., *group activity*, *management*, *content control*, *materials (type)* and *source* were selected (Ishizuka et.al, 2005; Shimura, 2010). A value from 1-5 was assigned to each of these five features based on the percentage of class time spent on that feature. The scores were based on an interval scale: 0-19 percent of class time equals a score of 1, 20-39 percent equals a score of 2, 40-60 percent is 3, 60-80 percent is 4 and 80-100 percent is 5.

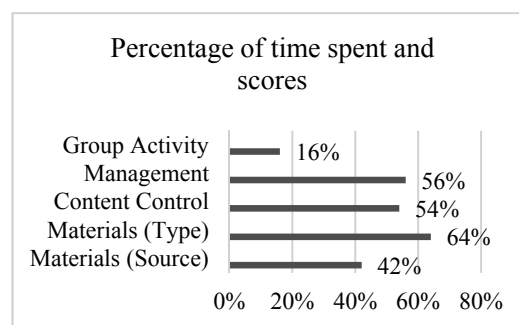


Figure 4: Percentage of time spent and rated scores for each category

Thus, the observed class which spend 16% (8 minutes) on *group activities* (pair works), 56% (28 minutes) on teacher's procedural *management*, 54% (27 minutes) on *content control*, 64% (32 minutes) on *materials* used and 42% (21 minutes) on the *source* used for teaching-learning processes received individual scores of 1 + 3 + 3 + 4 + 3, for a total of 14. Global scores ranged from a low of 5, which would be considered a weak indicator of communicative orientation, to a high of 22. The score for the class was 14, just above the midpoint on the global scale. Figure 4 shows the global score for the class observed.

In terms of COLT (Part A) analysis, it can be clearly seen that the four skills of target language were almost equally exposed. It shows that teaching-learning procedures were well-organized for the proficiency and balance of four skills. As the students' active participation could be seen and the interactions between students using target language were also discovered, it can generally be assumed that the class observed was quite communicative. Moreover, according to the global score rating, the class obtained a score of 14 out of 25. But it still does not guarantee that it was a perfect communicative class when Part B of COLT shows some limitations.

The analysis of COLT Part B focuses on the verbal input and interactions of teachers and students and thus is more detailed than the Part A analysis. The results also showed that teacher talked most of the time and control the classroom interaction. The teacher spent a great deal of time giving directions and explanations mean the class was quite teacher-centered. Teacher focused on message rather than form in the reaction to student's utterances and feedbacks for students' utterances were rarely found. For more than 20 percent of class time, students had to involve in individual seat work which did not foster communication.

Student talk is another important matter in classroom interaction. During the observation period, it was noted that students had to conduct pair works and interacted using target language. But it was difficult to say that communicative classroom interactions were exposed. Because whether the students used the target language efficiently or not, whether they applied the correct forms of the target language or not and whether they conducted a smooth communication or not were partially shown or elicited.

The comparing between COLT Part A and Part B analyses of this study shows that the class observed was generally quite communicative-oriented but some limitations were also found.

III Discussion

For the class observed, the content which was taught is describing about the city or the place. The students were asked to apply the same forms by writing the extended sentences. When introducing with some talks, instead of emphasizing on the content, it will be better to

emphasize on the forms which are going to be focused for describing a place. Some questions should be delivered to students to elicit what forms can also be used beyond the forms in the lesson. And the communicative activities which students can apply those forms should be created. How to respond is to be taught before the activities as responding also plays as one of the important roles in successful communication. The teacher has to find ways to elicit using target language from students when students responded minimally.

Asking students doing pair work or group work creates an active classroom but a desired quality and quantity of students output or students talk in the activity has to be obtained. The activities students are asked to engage should have to be interesting enough for the students which can challenge their motivation and linguistic abilities. After the students' pair talk, what students talked should be presented to an extent amount of time so that the whole class could be able to learn from the output of each other and from the feedback of the teacher. Having the outputs of the target lesson from only about two students representing the whole class was quite difficult to assume if the learning goals were reached or not. Teachers have the responsibility to structure the classrooms and establish situations which can promote communicative language learning environment so that students can acquire and use target language beyond the textbook and classroom.

For second language acquisition, learners' motivation is one of the main factors to consider. The teacher should adjust the teaching styles to better meet the needs and expectations of the students. Learner anxiety is one of the hindrances in learning a language. Creating a friendly and motivated environment is important to drive away students' feelings of worry, nervousness, and stress that many students experience when learning and using a second language. Although the audiolingual approach with its emphasis on speaking and listening could be used successfully, highly motivated learners are needed who are eager to use target language to an extent. Offering positive contribution to students' motivation is one of the tools teachers have to use.

The students had to be encouraged to produce sufficient utterances and their utterances should be corrected, repeated and paraphrased to a great extent by the teacher to

draw their attention to the language forms and their output. Thus, students could have the opportunities to practice and achieve grammatical and communicative competence. Conducting some activities that all students could be able to participate, for example: role plays, might enable students to expose the efficient amount of targeted language and how well they apply the correct forms or messages could also be seen.

The emphasis should not only be on comprehension, fluency, or accuracy alone but also on feedback. Teachers should be especially aware of errors that the majority of students in the class are tend to make. Teachers should try to become more aware of language features and provide necessary and suitable guided instruction in the use of them by their students. The teachers should also need to encourage their students to ask questions or to be eager in knowing about the target language.

It is hoped that some implications could be found from the findings of this study to contribute the effective and efficient communicatively oriented classroom teaching.

The present study has some limitations. Although it is a descriptive and exploratory analysis of a class, this study is a small case study. As the class observation was conducted to a class of one of the leading schools in Nagoya, it could not be assumed that all the schools are expected to conduct their classes in the same way. For Part B of COLT which depends on the transcriptions has problem as some of the students' utterances were unclear enough to get accurate transcription. Moreover, because of the large class size and because students tended to speak softly, the video recording could not clearly and accurately provide students' voices. Therefore, student-student interaction could not be analyzed and only the analysis of teacher-student interaction was done.

IV Conclusion

Teachers' comments, positive reinforcement, encouraging statements and positive feedbacks are vitally important in motivating students to use English in the class. Concerning with the problem of large class size, teachers should prepare and think in advance of how they will organize different activities with them. Students should be equipped with all

accesses that could enable them to get plentiful exposure and plenty of opportunities to use language effectively and efficiently. Integration and balancing of four skills in English curriculum and effective teaching methods might help students' English language learning. Moreover, letting the students notice their mistakes and enable to repair them by providing proper amount of corrective feedback is crucial for second language acquisition.

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