

「オーセンティック」な英語コミュニケーション・タスク導入の試みにおける課題と可能性について

Tasks for Authentic English Communication

カチョフ シェロ Cheryl Kirchhoff

Abstract: Teachers and learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) can easily lose sight of the purpose of language learning when there are few opportunities to use the language. Therefore EFL teachers need to create tasks for authentic use of English. Computer-mediated communication provides many options for using English to interact with foreigners in meaningful ways and for culture learning. This paper presents tasks that created a real audience for writing an introduction letter, requesting a pamphlet from a foreign school and developing a friendship with an American university student. Although there are risks to including authentic communication tasks in a curriculum, they are valuable for helping students become users of English.

要約：生活の中で英語を使う機会が少ない環境にある英語教育者と学習者は、外国語を学ぶ目的を見失う可能性がある。したがって、英語教育者は現実の文脈における英語コミュニケーションの課題を作成する必要がある。外国人との交流および異文化学習のために、インターネットを様々な形で利用することが可能である。本稿では、現実の文脈における英語コミュニケーションの課題（自己紹介の手紙、海外の学校のパンフレット取り寄せ、アメリカの大学生との交流）の実践報告をする。「オーセンティック」な英語コミュニケーションの課題の導入には、何らかのリスクが伴うのは確かであるが、英語学習者が英語使用者になるための大事な要素である。

Keywords: authentic, EFL, tasks, computer-mediated communication, culture learning
キーワード：「オーセンティック」、英語教育、タスク、コンピュータ利用、異文化学習

The purpose of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is to help students develop the knowledge and skills to communicate with foreigners; however this purpose can be forgotten because opportunities for learners to use the language are rare. Likewise, EFL learners can easily lose sight of the goal of language for communication when English education focuses on university entrance test preparation. Therefore, Japanese university students' attitude toward continued English study has been described as apathetic and lacking motivation (McVeigh, 2001). Thus, university EFL teachers need to help learners develop new aims for continuing English language study (Antonio & O'Donnell, 2004).

Although the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has included 'communication' as an objective in its English education guidelines since 1989, it was difficult to implement (Sakai, 2011). The 2003

guidelines entitled, "Cultivating Japanese with English Abilities," specifically call for university graduates to be able to use English at a professional level in their work. University EFL educators play an important role in helping students to learn to use the language they have studied for communicative purposes. Real contexts for use of English have become a necessity and teachers need to creatively arrange these opportunities in the classroom (Iwai and Rinnert, 2010).

Tasks which use English for authentic communication can renew learners' motivation to improve their English ability. Japanese university students when surveyed have shown their desire for authentic English communication opportunities (Tanoue, 2004; Yoshida et al, 2012). When there is an authentic audience for English communication besides the teacher, students' motivation has been shown to increase (Collins et al, 2009; Rooks, 2008).

Even when learners ability is inadequate, “once the learners experience the pleasure of using English (and its difficulty, too), they appear to become more eager to seek further opportunities to study and use it, even without being required to do so by others” (Iwai & Rinnert, pp. 283-284). Furthermore, opportunity to use English for authentic communication was shown to help highly motivated Japanese EFL learners to maintain their motivation (Tanaka, 2011).

Communication technology can connect EFL learners to other English speakers and create real communication contexts. Computer-mediated-communication (CMC) through electronic mail, video conferencing among others, has been used for authentic, interactive and meaningful communication in Japanese universities (Collins et al, 2009; Shiozawa, 2005; Uchida & Mori, 2011). CMC is a way for learners to interact across barriers of language, distance and culture (Byram & Feng, 2004; Ware & Kramersch, 2005). Tandem learning projects which connect pairs of learners with different native languages to interact and learn each other’s languages, have been shown to influence all aspects of language learning (Kabata & Edasawa, 2011). Email exchange tasks were found to be an optimal learning experience in which “students were focused on the language as a means of communication but also on its form as they tried to make themselves understood. In this way, the participants seemed to experience both the indirect focus that enhances fluency and the kind of noticing that contributes to accuracy in language use” (Egbert, 2003, p. 512). Whether the communication is asynchronous as in email, or synchronous as in video conferencing, learners experience language as a flexible tool for building relationships. Moreover, when these relationships are cross-cultural learners are exposed to various lessons in cultural learning.

Learning about culture, an element of foreign language teaching, may begin as a facts-oriented study, yet is thought to be best learned in experiential ways (Byram & Feng, 1997). Computer mediated communication with people in a different culture includes many elements of intercultural communication. Learners will

experience interesting discoveries and unexpected problems. There will be differences in communication style, academic calendars and time zones. More importantly, stereotypes are often modified, leading to more complex ideas of the other culture (Itakura, 2004)

Computer-mediated authentic English tasks involve risks for the learners and the teacher (Levy, 2007). The learners feel pressure in how they convey themselves to a foreigner who may be a peer. Misunderstandings due to cultural differences do occur (Ware & Kramersch, 2005). The teacher takes multiple risks logistically and technologically. Moreover, the teacher cannot control the degree of cooperation of foreigner participants. However, by accepting risk in the classroom the teacher is modeling an attitude of flexibility which is necessary in intercultural communication. The risks and the effort of computer-mediated authentic tasks also show the learner the value the teacher places on students becoming English users.

This paper presents tasks that involve authentic use of English by Japanese learners in EFL communication classes at Nagano Prefectural College. The tasks provided the students with experiences of using English for its intended purpose, communicating with native English speakers. Having a real audience for English writing and speaking tasks resulted in students showing seriousness and excitement about doing the tasks. Some of the tasks were tandem learning involving interaction with American university students studying Japanese language and culture. The classes were conducted in classrooms without computers.

Nagano Prefectural College (NPC) has an academic agreement with The University of Missouri St. Louis (UMSL) in the USA at which there are students who learn Japanese. Instructors of the Japanese classes were contacted and tasks that were beneficial to learners at both campuses were planned. The academic calendars of the two schools only overlap for one month in April and two months in the fall.

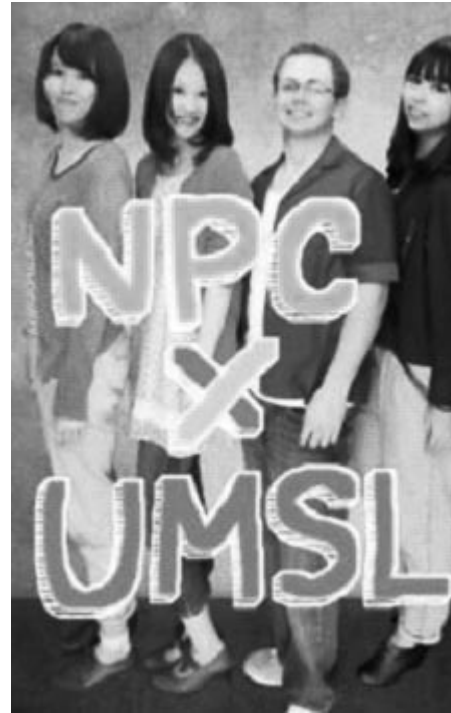
Description of Authentic English Communication Tasks

The first two tasks described are incorporated into a writing class for first year English majors. The aim of the class is to develop English writing skill, for letters and essays which the students may use in the future at a university or work place. In the past assignments were read only by the teacher, and any real purpose was an imagined one in the future. This differs from real-life writing which envisions the audience and has a communicative purpose. In order to develop this element of an authentic audience the following two tasks were initiated.

A. Introduction Letter

Writing a self-introduction letter is a common assignment in writing classes and textbooks. Although there is a valid reason for learners to introduce themselves to a new teacher, there is little excitement. However, when the NPC students were asked to introduce themselves to American university students they showed earnestness, excitement and anticipation of possible relationship with a peer.

The UMSL students wrote brief letters in Japanese on picture postcards and sent them to Japan. Meanwhile, the NPC students wrote introduction letters in English. In both locations the teacher sent the students' letters in a packet in order to monitor completion of the task, ensure timely delivery and because envelop writing had not been taught yet. It was intended for the packet of postcards to arrive before the NPC students wrote the final draft of their letters in order to personalize the communication, but the postcards arrived late. Even though the NPC students wrote to an unknown American student they were still very serious about their letter knowing that an American would read it. Some of them included a Japanese message on the back making it a bilingual letter. Some of the NPC students included their email address which resulted in some email communication and one UMSL student visiting Nagano City (photo follows).



The UMSL student's teacher observed that the student gained confidence in Japanese language following the communication exchange and visit.

B. Request a Pamphlet

Learning to write a letter and envelope in English is for the purpose of sending the letter overseas, yet few learners have actually done that (Chujo, 2010). In this task learners wrote a letter to a language school or university overseas and requested a pamphlet of the school. The students chose a school from a list of schools and addresses. Instruction on the content of the letter and on how to address an envelope was given. The students were then given an envelope and asked to purchase a stamp for it. The learners wrote a draft of the letter and envelope. As above, the authentic nature of this task caused the students to be very serious about accurately communicating their ideas and completing the envelope.

In the following term the pamphlets were brought to class where learners' curiosity about other schools led into the next task of writing a report about the schools. Because not every learner received a pamphlet pairs were formed and they collaborated to write different sections of the report. Learners also used the internet to find

additional information about the schools' location and programs.



Students with pamphlet

C. Email exchange and live chat

The following series of tasks was a part of an English Communication class for 2nd year English majors at NPC. These tasks were planned to compliment the education of 3rd and 4th year American students studying Japanese at UMSL. A series of four tasks, called 'Friends Project,' was planned for the participants to learn about friendships in the other culture and in the process become friends that would enjoy live conversation. The tasks were sequenced to gradually increase depth of thinking and self-revealing.

Task 1: exchange email introduction letters

Task 2: exchange questions about high school friendships

Task 3: write a response to the following questions, 'What do you look for in a friend?' 'How do you communicate with friends?'

Task 4: prepare appointment and topics for live chat

The four tasks were completed in the learners' L2, but subsequent communication was private and could be in either language. Bilingual communication would be authentic for these participants and ease the process of becoming friends (Billingsley & Whalley, 2000). The tasks were sent to the foreign partner by a due date along with being submitted to the teacher. All communication between the groups was done

outside of class due to the two classrooms not having internet access and the 15 hour time difference.

Preparation for the task sequence involved arranging the 30 NPC students in groups to be paired with the 10 UMSL students. Photos were taken of the participants and sent prior to writing the introduction emails.

Task 1 was completed with only one group experiencing difficulty due to a change in email address. NPC students showed excitement and anxiety as they began using English for real purposes. Through the introduction letters the NPC students learned about age and racial diversity of American university students.

Task 2 proceeded as planned with the NPC students discovering similarities and differences in high school friendships.

Task 3 was the most structured of the tasks, asking the participants to write responses to two questions, 'What do you look for in a friend?' 'How do you communicate with your friends?' The NPC students found the first question to be very difficult to understand. Not only was the phrase 'to look for in' new to them, but the concept of seeking a friendship with someone because of some trait was an idea they were unfamiliar with as expressed in the comment below.

"We hardly have thought about how to make friends, but we look for feeling of comfortable, relief and joyful in a friend." (Group 6)

"When we look for a friend, we try to talk with many students and play many times. We think that it is important to communicate face to face with many students. If we can confess our secret, we think we find a real friend!" (Group 5)

The NPC students sent their responses but only five of the ten groups received responses from the UMSL students. The lack of student autonomy in this task and also the timing, during a one-week holiday at UMSL, may have contributed to the low response rate by the Americans.

Task 4 involved planning some topics for the live chat. NPC students needed to find a time when their group members and the UMSL partner had available time. This became difficult

as the UMSL exam week approached and communication broke down between several partners. Four of the groups did accomplish the actual live chat, usually talking for about one hour.

The Japanese students at NPC developed a broader view of American culture through the series of tasks. They noticed great diversity in the UMSL student body (different races, ages and marital status, post-graduates and international students). Additionally, they got to know people who did not fit their image of the 'friendly American.' The NPC students, when asked to evaluate the project, were positive about using English for authentic communication with a foreigner, as seen in the following comments.

"I had never communicated with a foreigner so I was very worried. But this project was a very good experience for me."

"Through writing and speaking in English with a same age foreign person I became to want to know a different culture. That is why 'Friends Project' made me aggressive."

"I learned that not all people fit the stereotype of Americans. I was afraid of communication with other language people because of words, but I learned to feel fun in it!

Negative comments expressed disappointment when communication broke down, the desire for more communication and for more American participants as expressed in the following comments.

"We need more time and more American students."

"Friends Project was good experience, but I wanted to more communication with students."

"This project is good experience, but our team didn't Skype. You must give equality of opportunity."

Future authentic communication tasks can be improved in many ways. A weakness of the email exchange and live chat task was the arrangement of a group of Japanese students communicating with one American student. Planning for a one-to-

one arrangement would increase the authenticity of the communication and ensure that all students are fully engaged in the tasks. Additionally, the timing of the email exchange task could be improved to avoid vacations and end of the term business of the American students.

Conclusion

Providing Japanese university students with assignments that use English for an authentic purpose can change their apathy into serious engagement in English communication. This paper has shown tasks that can be incorporated into an EFL classroom that provide learners with a real context to use English. Even though the classroom was not a room with CALL facilities, the internet-based tasks could be completed by learners on their own time outside of class. Tasks that have learners communicate with people overseas involve uncertainty of how the other person will respond. Yet dealing with uncertainty is a part of the development of a person who can use English for intercultural communication and therefore a worthwhile addition to the EFL classroom.

The author would like to acknowledge Prof. Elizabeth Ecklecamp and Lecturer Amy Michael at The University of St. Louis for their willingness to incorporate new tasks into their curricula, and to the reviewer for helpful comments.

References Cited

- Antonio, J. & O'Donnell, K. (2004). Using criterion referenced assessment toward a reorientation in student motivation. *The Language Teacher*, 28. 3, 19-25.
- Billingsley, P. & Whalley, T. (2000). Acquiring a multicultural outlook through bilingual classes: Momoyama students on the front line. *国際文化論集* 21, 29-64.
- Byram, M. (1997) *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. & Feng, A. (2004). Culture and language

- learning: teaching, research and scholarship. *Language Teaching*, 37, 149-168.
- Chujo, J. (2010, May). Application of the Project Method in an EFL class setting at NEAR Language Education Conference, Niigata Japan.
- Collins, K., Ellison, T. & Jewel, G. (2009). Implementation of computer-mediated communication through a social network service in a Japanese university. Tama University School of Management and Information Sciences *経営・情報研究*, 13, 67-74.
- Egbert, J. (2004). A study of flow theory in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 87, 4, 499-518.
- Itakura, H. (2004). Changing cultural stereotypes through e-mail assisted foreign language learning. *System*, 32, 37-51.
- Iwai, C., & Rinnert, C. (2010). Creating a real context of English use in EFL. In A. M. Stoke (Ed.), *JALT2009 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.
- Kabata, K. & Edasawa, Y. (2011). Tandem language learning through a cross-cultural keypal project. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15, 1, 104-121.
- Levy, M. (2007). Culture, culture learning and new technologies: Towards a pedagogical framework. *Language Learning & Technology*, 11, 2, 104-127.
- McVeigh, B. (2001). Higher education, apathy and post-meritocracy. *The Language Teacher*, 25, 10, 28-33.
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, (2003). "Cultivating Japanese with English Abilities."
<http://www.mext.g.jp/english/topics/03072801>.
- Norman, D. (2000). A CALL to communicate: The meaningful use of computers in English language learning. *Kansai Gaidai Educational Research and Report*, 1, 1-5.
- Rooks, M. (2008). A unique opportunity for communication: An intercultural email exchange between Japanese and Thai students. *CALL-EJ Online* 10, 1, 1-13.
- Sakai, H. (2011, November). *Shogakko gaigokugo-katsudou-no-doukou* [Trends in elementary school foreign language activities] Guest lecture at Nagano Prefectural College, Nagano City.
- Shiozawa, Y. (2005). Strategic Use of Videoconferencing in Intermediate EFL. *文教大学国際学部紀要*、第16巻1号.
- Tanaka, K. (2011). Long winding road: A study of highly motivated learners of English in Japan. Meiji Gakuin University *International and Regional Studies*, 40, 23-53.
- Tanoue, Y. (2004). Investigating beliefs and strategies of Japanese university students in learning EFL. *Language Education and Technology*, 41, 37-56.
- Uchida, A. & Mori, S. (2011). Email exchange project in college foreign language classrooms. In A. Stewart (Ed.), *JALT2010 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.
- Ware, P. & Kramsch, C. (2005). Toward an intercultural stance: Teaching German and English through telecollaboration. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89, ii, 190-205.
- Yoshida, K., Aliponga, J., Koshiyama, Y., Gamble, C., Wilkins, M., & Ando, S. (2012). Communicative language teaching in tertiary EFL contexts in Japan: Examining learner beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. In A. Stewart & N. Sonda (Eds.), *JALT2011 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT.

(長野県短期大学 多文化コミュニケーション学科
英語英米文化専攻)
(連絡先 〒380-8525 長野県長野市三輪 8-49-7
TEL 026-234-1221 FAX 026-235-0026)
(平成 24 年 10 月 1 日受付、平成 24 年 11 月 28 日受理)