Classroom Communicative Competence and
Conversational Routines/Patterns for Interactive L2 Users
in the Japanese EFL Context

Goro MURAHATA
University of Miyazaki
Yoshiko MURAHATA
Miyakonojo Higashi High School

Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold: to argue for the need of recasting the construct of communicative competence (CC) in view of the low efficiency of current English education in Japan; and to contend that knowledge of and skills in conversational routines/patterns (CRPs) lie at the core of the recast CC, classroom communicative competence (CCC). We first discuss a drawback of the global sense of CC as the goal of English education in Japan on the ground that every context demands a particular CC. It is suggested that the CC, required for our students to participate in and learn from classroom experiences and to become interactive L2 users, should be context-specific and hence appropriate to the reality of the classroom. We then scrutinize the pedagogical adequacy of CRPs as the basis of CCC drawing research evidence from applied linguistic studies to date. It has been found that CRPs are heavily used in everyday interactions and have critical characteristics for efficient communication, for instance, stored and retrieved as a whole and functionally associated with a particular social discourse. However, despite their importance in successful communication and language acquisition, CRPs have been rather neglected in language teaching. This paper concludes by suggesting ways of how we can make CCC develop during the course of successive years of English education at Japanese schools.

1. Introduction

This paper first argues that what English education in Japan should aim for is not communicative competence (CC) as a buzzword or an abstract and theoretical concept as described by Canale (1983) for example. Rather it is classroom communicative competence (CCC) (Wilkinson, 1982; Johnson, 1995; Murahata & Murahata, 1997) that should be aimed at. CCC serves as a vital facilitator for second language (L2) users to actively participate in and socially experience L2 activities in the classroom. As has been often pointed out, interaction
patterns vary from one speech community to another and so does the notion of CC from one context to another (McGroaty, 1984; Wolfson, 1983). Therefore, the construct of CC should be theoretically and pedagogically appropriate to the reality of the language learning context. In this paper, we’ll first recast the notion of CC and argue for CCC so as to make it fit in the Japanese English learning context. We’ll then insist that conversational routines/patterns (CRPs) form the basis of CCC. Insights and perspectives from applied linguistics, first language (L1) and L2 acquisition and pragmatics have supported the important roles CRPs play in our language use and acquisition. Finally, we’ll suggest pedagogical ways of how we have L2 users experience and use CRPs in the Japanese EFL classroom. We believe that those will eventually help their CCC develop during the course of some successive years of English learning at elementary and junior high schools.

A nation-wide survey on current circumstances of English education, with first year high school students as participants, conducted by MEXT in June 2015 shows seriously low efficiency of English education (MEXT, 2016). English communication skills of junior high school graduates remain quite low, and the rate of English dislikes was 43.2%, which showed their lack of motivation to learn English. When it comes to speaking skills, moreover, many of them say they have difficulty in exchanging face-to-face spontaneous interactions in English and the range of expressions they can use is quite limited. Furthermore, our own class observations, at both elementary and junior high schools, have revealed that very few students interact with each other in English in class, though their teacher, usually a non-native speaker of English, teaches either all or most of the time in English. Students’ L2 use is obviously confined to a bizarre Q-A exchange such as ‘A: Where did you go last Sunday? B: I went shopping,’ which we call an ‘interrogation at the police station.’ Otherwise they primarily use their L1 for almost all other classroom activities.

Another large nation-wide social survey with about 3,000 Japanese adult participants, age ranged from 20 to 89, also showed poor self-rated skills in conversation irrespective of their ages. More than 85% of them rated their proficiency in English conversation extremely low, at the level of either ‘I can speak English almost not at all’ or ‘I can only exchange greetings’ (Sugita, 2004). Interestingly enough, even younger participants in their 20s or 30s were also negative about their conversation skills, rating themselves at either of those levels above, 83.8% and 78.0% for men in their 20s and 30s, 73.3% and 81.0% for women in their 20s and 30s respectively.

What makes for such lack of effectiveness of current English education in Japan? We think English education in Japan has emphasized the development of competences outside of the classroom, which is an illusory community for the L2 users in Japan, but not competencies required in the classroom, which is a real social community for them. Students are not used to using English in class and have almost no chance to use it outside of class, therefore don’t know how to express themselves in English (Murahata & Murahata, 1997). As a result, they remain silent even in class without responding as much as teachers expect in conversational English classes (Helgesen, 1993).
2. Recasting the construct of CC

2.1 Background

In this section, keeping such serious circumstances of current English education in mind, we’ll recast the construct of CC from not a theoretical perspective but a pedagogical perspective. Our concern here is actual competence, “the use of language to understand and exchange messages in the real world” rather than the more theoretical construct of communicative competence, “the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication” (Canale, 1983, p. 5). Behind the focus of discussion is our conjecture that while the often-cited construct of CC proposed by for example Canale (1983) has given an impact on and a theoretical framework to communicative language teaching, it is too vague, from a pedagogical point of view, to grasp what is really meant by the term as McGraorty (1984, p. 258) strongly asserts:

Each situation demands a particular kind of competence, or demonstrated skill, from the participant. Yet the term is often used in such a global sense that it is sometimes difficult to know what is meant by competence in general or, more specifically, by the term communicative competence (emphasis in original).

The conventional construct of CC has given us an impression as to its feasibility for any context of situation. However, communication takes place in an infinite variety of situations and if “[p]atterns of interaction vary, sometimes strikingly, from one speech community to another (Wolfson, 1983, p. 61),” then the competencies to make the verbal interaction happen in each community too vary from one community to another. In that sense, CC needs to be context-specific (Savignon, 1997); that is, CC in a particular context is different from that in another context according to the reality inherent in each context of situation.

Then, what is the reality of English learning context in Japan? The first thing we should mention is no doubt learning and using English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Several characteristics, among others, along with such an EFL context can be listed as follows:

1) The L2 plays no major or only limited role in daily life in the community and is primarily learnt through instruction and used only in the classroom (Ellis, 1994; Ortega, 2007);
2) Students have very limited opportunities for L2 practice even in the classroom, up to five hours a week at most, and the exposure to and involvement with the L2 outside the classroom is rare or impossible (Ortega, 2007);
3) Because of having few opportunities to use English in daily life, students’ motivation to learn it and confidence in its skills are very low (Takiguchi, 2015);
4) The main goal of learning English is not to approximate a native speaker of English, but to become a successful L2 user with multi-competence and multi-cognition who can interact people from other languages and cultures (Cook, 2002; Murahata & Murahata, 2016a, b); 5) Students, and the teacher and students almost always, share the same L1 (Ortega, 2007).

Of the five, the first three characteristics are particularly critical to the EFL context like that of Japan. The exposure to and the use of English for communication is almost only limited to the English classroom, though not enough length of time to practice, and opportunities to use English are even rare for many people. A nation-wide social survey in 2002 (Sugita, 2004) showed this limitation. Regardless of age there were few Japanese who had opportunities to use English in their daily life or business. When they were asked ‘Do you use English in daily life or business?’ the majority of them answered negatively, ‘I have almost no opportunities to use English,’ at the rate of 83.7% for men and 87.6% for women respectively. The rate of those who answered ‘I sometimes use English for business.’ was only 5.7% for men and 3.0% for women.

The fact that people have few opportunities to use English in their daily life leads to lack of incentive or motivation to learn it, confidence as a L2 user (Takiguchi, 2015), and, most serious of all, ultimate attainment in English skills (Ortega, 2007). What these circumstances indicate is the need for a discussion on how we can make the most of the classroom for their CC to grow. In other words, we should provide L2 users with ample opportunities in the classroom in order for them to sense themselves as L2 users in their classroom with confidence not for hypothetical and unrealistic communicative purposes outside of the classroom such as ‘asking the way to the school,’ but for real communicative purposes for what is happening in the classroom such as ‘responding to others’ utterances,’ ‘getting permissions from the teacher’ or ‘asking for opinions.’

The use of English for classroom life, that is, English for what actually occurs in the classroom, seems to have been rather neglected in our English education. In the next section we’ll examine in detail what CCC is, and what constitutes CCC.

2.2 The Notion of CCC

The classroom may be an insufficient context for acquiring a L2 language as Breen (1985) claims, but the classroom, as a specific community of the teacher and his or her students, has its own real communicative purposes. According to Johnson (1995, p. 6), CCC is defined as "knowledge of and competence in the social and interactional norms that govern classroom communication" just as those which regulate communication in the L2 spoken community. In other words, "[j]ust as communicative competence is considered to be essential for second language learners to participate in the target language culture..., classroom communicative competence is essential for second language students to participate in and learn from their second language classroom experiences" (Johnson, 1995, pp. 5-6). Mehan (1979, p. 33) also suggests that "students need to know with whom, when, and where they can speak and act, they must have
speech and behavior that are appropriate for classroom situations and they must be able to interpret implicit classroom rules.”

It is our contention that one of the serious problems inherent in English education in Japan is a tacit presumption on which we regard the global sense of CC as the goal of English education in Japan while neglecting the reality by dreaming the world of illusion. Every context of situation demands a particular CC. Hence, the CC required for our students to participate in and learn from classroom experiences should not be the one needed for communication in the illusionary world, but the one appropriate to the reality in the classroom situation given.

This argument is well parallel with the idea that the goal of all L2 learning, in all contexts, is not achieving a native-like mastery of the L2 (Lightbown and Spada, 1993), but becoming a successful L2 user with multi-competence, who is a unique person both linguistically and cognitively (Cook, 2002; Murahata & Murahata, 2016a, b; Murahata, Murahata & Cook, 2016), irrespective of how proficient they are compared to the native speaker. In reality it is almost impossible for the L2 user, who starts to study the L2 at school in the EFL context, to become a native-like speaker of the L2 no matter how hard he or she works on learning it.

The goal of becoming a native-like speaker of English, therefore, might be only an illusion for our students and the realistic goal for them is to become a person who can use English for real communicative purposes as a member of the classroom community. However, this does not mean a complete negligence on the global sense of CC for English education in Japan. We do admit EFL teaching heavily relies, consciously or unconsciously, on the unrealistic construct of CC to some extent. We believe that CCC plays a scaffolding role in advances of competencies progressively toward more global ones contributing “to successful classroom participation, productive classroom learning, increased opportunities for the development of L2 competence both inside and beyond the classroom” (Johnson, 1995, pp. 168-169).

2.3 Proposed Components of CCC

What constitutes CCC then? What is actually happening in the L2 classroom as a social community? Taking into consideration the various activities in the classroom community, we propose a CCC model which comprises the following components:

1) Social component: establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships (EMIR)
2) Orderly-disciplinary component: observing classroom rules and discipline (OCRD)
3) Cognitive-academic component: learning the contents of English courses (LCEC)

The first component is the social component which we assume to be a prerequisite for the overall CCC. With knowledge and skills related to this component, students establish and maintain interpersonal relationships (EMIR) in the classroom. They are expected to learn in the L2 how to greet for encounter, respond to others’ utterances, ask questions, sympathize others, worry...
about others, give compliments, encourage others, greet for parting, and the like. All of them are nothing but basic socializing skills needed in a social community. The second component is the orderly-disciplinary component. Students should observe classroom rules and discipline (OCRD) to orderly learn in class. They have to have knowledge and skills which enable them to urge others to do something, get permissions from the teacher or other students, inform others of something, offer assistance to others, request, warn, etc. The third component is the cognitive-academic component. In the classroom students communicate with others not only for social and disciplinary purposes but also for learning the contents of the course. They are expected to be able to ask questions, direct, confirm, request, ask for opinions, agree or disagree with someone, express opinions, ask for help, or express understandings, among others. As you can see in Figure 1, in the latter two components standing on the EMIR foundation can’t be mutually exclusive but closely intertwined with each other so that a certain expression (e.g., ‘You can go first.’) can be regarded as the one for either of the components.

3. CRPs as the Foundation of CCC

3.1 The Importance of CRPs

In this section, we’ll discuss why conversational routines/patterns (CRPs) are so important as the core of CCC. Knowledge of and skills in CRPs play important roles in our language use, both production and comprehension, for efficient communication and language acquisition (either L1 or L2), and accordingly CRPs should be in the center of CCC.

Jespersen (1924) might be one of the first to illustrate the importance of formular units in our language system distinguishing it from rule-governed free expressions when he says:
Some things in language—in any language—are of the formula character; that is to say, no one can change anything in them. A phrase like ‘How do you do?’ is entirely different from such a phrase as ‘I gave the boy a lump of sugar.’ In the former everything is fixed … One may indeed analyze such a formula and show that it consists of several words, but it is felt and handled as a unit … (p. 18).

Our “knowledge of language and one’s ability to use it … include knowledge of how to create sentences ‘from scratch’ and knowledge of prefabricated patterns” (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992, p. 13). Coulmas (1981, p. 1) claims “… a great deal of communicative activity consists of enacting routines making use of prefabricated linguistic units in a well-known and generally accepted manner.” Furthermore, based on their corpus analysis Biber, Conrad and Cortes (2004, p. 372) even argue that “much of our everyday language use is composed of prefabricated expressions.” While the rule-governed perspective of language has dominated linguistic theory, “there have always been pockets within linguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics which have suggested that ready-made chunks of unanalysed language are as important as productive rules” (Weinert, 1995, p. 180). In what follows, we’ll see evidence to show how important CRPs are in our daily language use and language acquisition along with their functions.

First of all, whatever we call them (see a terminological discussion later in this section), CRPs’ pervasive nature, recurrence or high frequency, is one of the most prominent characteristics. While we should keep it in mind that there remain issues in defining the construct of CRPs and adopting the criteria, that is, which linguistic expressions we should take as CRPs (Read & Nation, 2004), linguists have shown that as much as 60% (Erman & Warren, 2000) to 70% (Altenberg, 1990) of spoken discourse by adult native speakers is formulaic in nature. Kecskés (2000, p. 606) remarks, “A considerable part of our everyday conversation is usually restricted to short routinized interchanges where we do not always mean what we say.” If CRPs are so pervasive and play an important role in our daily language use, then consequently L2 users must have knowledge of and skills in them at some level as part of their CCC (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Weinert, 1995; Aijmer, 1996; Schmitt; Conklin & Schmitt, 2008).

In addition to their pervasive nature, CRPs are also considered to play an important role in L1 or L2 acquisition. They create collaborative discourse (Ellis, 1994), conversational interactions (Gass & Selinker, 2007) both of which might be seen as the matrix of language acquisition. Without social interaction, there is no language acquisition (Coulmas, 1981); and without CRPs, which often construct conversational turns, there is no fluent verbal interaction (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Aijmer, 1996; Wood, 2006). CRPs are also considered to facilitate syntactic development of the target language (Wong-Fillmore, 1976; Peters, 1983; Myles, Hooper & Mitchell, 1998; Tomasello, 2000). As Hatch (1978, p. 404) states about the language acquisition process, “One learns how to do conversation, one learns how to interact verbally, and
out of this interaction syntactic structures are developed.” This doesn’t mean, however, that the development of every single syntactic item must go through this process, that is, from whole to part. If we really want to become a syntactically competent language user, we should “be able to move in both directions, from part to whole and from whole to part.” (Tomasello, 2000, p. 66).

According to L2 acquisition studies, it has been revealed that CRPs play an important role in the L2 development of L2 users, particularly in the beginning stages (Ellis, 1984; Rescorla & Okuda, 1987). For example, Hakuta (1974), one of the pioneers of L2 acquisition research, found that his L2 user passed through a stage in which she used many unanalyzed chunks in predictable social contexts such as ‘What-is-that?’ or ‘I-want-to-go.’ until she got to creative use of language generated by more sophisticated syntactic rules. Another researcher, Wong-Fillmore (1976, p. 640) also claims that CRPs firstly acquired at the beginning stage “evolve directly into creative language.” Myles, Hooper and Mitchell (1998) found that their child L2 users of French not only gradually unpacked the CRPs they acquired, but creatively used parts of them in their new conversational discourse. However, we are not sure yet about CRPs’ specific role in language acquisition (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992). Thus, it is too simplistic to “believe that it is enough to expose L2 learners to prefabs and the grammar will take care of itself” (Granger, 1998, p. 158).

Though there remains such an issue as the role of CRPs in language acquisition, one thing is for sure that CRPs contribute greatly to the fluency of their language use (Pawley & Syder, 1983; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Wray & Perkins, 2000; Wood, 2002, 2006; Celce-Murcia, 2007). Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992, p. 32) claim, “It is our ability to use lexical phrases … that helps us speak with fluency. This prefabricated speech has both the advantage of more efficient retrieval and of permitting speakers (hearers) to direct their attention to the larger structure of the discourse, rather than keeping it focused narrowly on individual words they are produced.” Since CRPs are used like a single independent lexicon, they help L2 users reduce the cognitive burden of encoding (one-by-one building blocks from scratch) and decoding. CRPs drive L2 users to attend to a more complex but creative linguistic system and make their language develop further.

The CRPs’ role of prompting L2 users’ fluency in the target language is in particular of pedagogical importance because of the expectation that fluency in the L2 makes L2 users feel a sense of using the L2 for real communication, which accordingly gives them confidence in themselves (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992), and eagerness and motivation to further their L2 knowledge and skills through actively participating in social communicative interactions in and outside of the classroom. Celce-Murcia (2007) argues for the need to give a more central role to formulaic language as opposed to language as system and balance language as system and language as formula proposing her own model of communicative competence with a sub-component called formulaic competence which is counterbalance to linguistic competence.

3.2 The Nature of CRPs
So far we have used the term CRPs without touching upon their basic characteristics pertaining to the definition of the term, their function in L2 users’ conversational discourse and their structural characteristics. Linguists have attempted to characterize the linguistic phenomenon from either a syntactic, semantic or functional perspective by using their own label such as, among others, formula, formular units (Jespersen, 1924), preff(abs (Bolinger, 1976; Erman & Warren, 2000), prefabricated routines/patterns (Hakuta, 1974), formulaic speech (Wong-Fillmore, 1976), gambits (Keller, 1979), conventionalized language forms (Yorio, 1980), routine formulas (Yorio, 1980), lexicalized sentence stems (Pawley & Syder, 1983), unanalyzed chunks (Peters, 1983), formulaic speech (language) (sequences) (Ellis, 1984; Weinert, 1995; Wray, 2000; Schmitt, 2004), lexical phrases (bundles) (Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Biber, Conrad & Cortes, 2004), conversational routines (Coulmas, 1981; Aijmer, 1996), multi-word items (composites) (Erman & Warren, 2000), item-based schemas (Tomasello, 2000), situation-bound utterances (Kecskés, 2000). At present there is no comprehensive definition of the phenomenon (Schmitt, 2004).

Whichever term is chosen to describe this particular verbal phenomenon, however, this is our basic understanding. When we talk about CRPs as conventionalized linguistic items “we are not dealing with a single phenomenon, but rather with a set of more and less closely related ones” (Wray, 2000, p. 464), and CRPs are a sequence of words or other meaning elements (Wray, 2000), high in frequency (Altenberg, 1990), psychologically stored in and retrieved from the long term-memory as a whole (Bolinger, 1976; Aijmer, 1996; Wray & Perkins, 2000), syntactically frozen or relatively fixed (Pawley & Syder, 1983), textually constituent making up a large portion of discourse (Aijmer, 1996), and functionally bound with a particular context or situation (Yorio, 1980; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Aijmer, 1996; Kecskés, 2000). In this paper we use the term conversational routines/patterns (CRPs), giving it a working definition:

CRPs are a highly-frequent string of words which is not grammatically-generated from scratch, but stored in and recalled from a long-term memory as an unanalyzed holistic unit, syntactically prefabricated, functionally associated with a particular context, and textually constituent structuring a large part of discourse.

The use of the term CRPs in this paper emphasizes routinized and semi-variable aspects of formulaic expressions which are closely bound to a particular standardized communicative situation (Aijmer, 1996; Kecskés, 2000). From a pedagogical point of view, the close relationship of CRPs with the situation is of great importance when we discuss which string of words to select for L2 learning and teaching as part of the curriculum. As Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) argue, CRPs are prefabricated strings of words which are assigned particular pragmatic functions in context, what they call ‘conventionalized form/function composites’ (p. 1), but not a sequence of words such as idioms, collocations or clichés without transparent functions. For example, ‘Nice talking to you.’ can be counted as CRP with a pre-closing function, but the idiom ‘It’s raining cats
Conventionalized forms make communication more orderly because they are regulatory in nature. They organize reactions and facilitate choices, thus reducing the complexity of communicative exchanges. They are group identifying. They separate those who belong from those who don’t. They do this by serving as instruments for establishing rapport, reinforcing awareness of group membership, perpetuating goals, values, and norms of the group, indicating speakers readiness to conform to group norms, and defining social relations and the relative status of the different communicators.

4. Suggestions for Developing CCC with the Aid of CRPs

We first argued for the need of a re-constructed version of CC, CCC, which is a more context-specific CC adequate to the classroom situation, the cradle for interactive L2 users. We then insisted that at the core of CCC are knowledge of and skills in CRPs, which play several critical roles in our language use and language acquisition. Among them, the most important one is the role of their aiding L2 users’ fluency in communicative interactions. As for the roles of conventionalized forms in communication, Yorio (1980, p. 438) remarks as follows:

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Critical roles in our language use and language acquisition. Among them, the most important one are  more elastic with slots for substitutions, but at the same time they are more cognitively demanding.

We will next see what the structural characteristics of conventionalized fixed strings of words are as CRPs, based on Nattinger & DeCarrico (1992). Nattinger and DeCarrico classified them into the following four categories: polywords, institutionalized expressions, phrasal constraints and sentence builders. Firstly, polywords function very much like single lexical items such as ‘Just a minute,’ ‘by the way,’ ‘Well done!’ ‘Cheer up!’ and ‘Good for you!’ Secondly, institutionalized expressions are of sentence length, usually functioning as separate utterances such as ‘How are you?’ ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Don’t worry.’ and ‘I hope not.’ Thirdly, phrasal constraints are short- to medium-length CRPs with variation of lexical and phrasal categories (NP, VP, AdjP, AdvP, N, V, Adj, Adv, etc.) such as ‘It’s my [your / Taro’s] turn.’ ‘You look great [happy / nice] today!’ ‘Have a nice day [evening / weekend].’ and ‘Nice talking with [seeing / meeting] you.’ And finally, sentence builders are those which provide the framework for whole sentences with a slot (X) such as ‘I think X.’ ‘I don’t know X.’ ‘You mean X?’ ‘Don’t you think X?’ ‘Could you show us X?’ ‘Why don’t you X?’ and ‘Are you saying X?’ As you can see, the CRPs falling in the latter two categories are more rule-governed and therefore more creative and flexible than the other two. However, it should be noted from a L2 users’ point of view that the latter two are more elastic with slots for substitutions, but at the same time they are more cognitively demanding.
If it is the case, CRPs have much pedagogical value of learning and teaching in the EFL classroom where the main goal is to foster successful L2 users of English who have very limited opportunities to use the target language once they leave the classroom.

But which CRPs, with what criteria, should we select for learning and teaching materials? Yorio (1980) proposed five acceptable criteria for selection, need, usefulness, productivity, frequency (or currency) and ease, but we ought to utilize those criteria only in relation to the context of situation. That is, in selecting CRPs, teachers should decide how necessary such-and-such a CRP is for the EFL classroom, how useful it is for our students to communicate in the classroom, how frequent it seems to occur in classroom discourse and how easy or difficult we think it is for the students at a particular level. As to the last criterion, the structural characteristics of CRPs discussed in the last section would serve as a useful reference. Polywords such as ‘Well done! / What’s wrong? / Take it easy.’ can be suitable ones for beginner students, and others for more advanced students. In order to integrate selected CRPs into the mainstream of learning and teaching materials, MEXT authorized English textbooks for junior high school students are a good source of materials to extract recurrent and useful CRPs from.

Table 1 below shows samples of the CRPs provisionally assorted by the present authors for elementary school 5th graders up to junior high school 3rd year students (for five successive years) according to the three components we propose for CCC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Social Component</th>
<th>Orderly-Disciplinary Component</th>
<th>Cognitive-Academic Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRPs for Elementary 5th Graders up to Junior High 3rd Graders (for five successive years)</td>
<td>How are you? Are you all right? Good job! Thank you. I’m sorry. You’re welcome. I like your T-shirt. Your English is good. I’m sorry I’m late. ... I’m so impressed. Thank you for the compliment. It made me happy. ...</td>
<td>Hurry up, please! Wait, please. Here you are. Can I go to the bathroom? I’m finished. It’s my turn. Can I go first? May I use your pen? Stop talking, please. Time is over. ... You can go first. Who is going to be the MC? ...</td>
<td>Repeat, please. Say this aloud, please. What’s this in English? More slowly, please. ... Could you read it for me? I don’t understand this part. I think X (this idea is good). ... What did you say? Could you give us an example? You mean X (John hasn’t seen fireworks)? ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total: 92 CRPs)</td>
<td>(Total: 106 CRPs)</td>
<td>(Total: 131 CRPs)</td>
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</table>
As the numbers at the bottom of the table show, 92 CRPs have been selected for EMIR, 106 for OCRD and 131 for LCEC respectively (Murahata & Murahata, in progress). Though compiled in a table, they cannot be mechanically taught one-by-one as a list of expressions. While repetition, substitution or expansion drills are necessary for students to use them fluently (Nattinger & DeCarrio, 1992), what is as important as such oral drills is to have students experience a real situation in the classroom where a particular CRP is used. As Yorio (1980, p. 440) mentions, “… in real language use we do not have a word and then find a situation or a sentence to put it in; rather we start with a situation for which we need certain words. Vocabulary exercises that start with a situation or topic, then, are more realistic and natural.” One of the important roles of EFL teachers then is to provide them with realistic situations where students can experience functional use of CRPs. Teachers are also expected to demonstrate by themselves how CRPs are used in particular classroom situations as a role model of the L2 user (Murahata & Murahata, 2016a, b).

Another suggestion is that since CRPs often occur with particular expected expressions just before or after them as a so-called adjacency pair such as ‘A: Thank you very much. B: You’re welcome.’ it would be beneficial to present students with CRPs in a form of adjacency pairs. Or as Petrin (2013) proposes, teachers can prepare a large wall chart with graphic organizers to graphically show how typical CRPs are used in relation to other CRPs in conversation discourse such as pre-openers (‘Excuse me?’), openers (‘Hi, Taro. How are you?’), sequencers, in our terminology for those CRPs which are arranged in a sequence of discourse to keep a conversation going (‘A: Could you repeat it please? B: All right. No problem.’), pre-closers (‘Well, I have to go next. / Nice talking to you.’) and closers (‘See you later. / Bye’).

Once having acquired a large variety of CRPs appropriate to realistic situations in the classroom, L2 users will be able to expand an unrealistic interaction into a longer, more natural, lively and humanistic conversation. Below is an expanded version of the interrogation at the police station we mentioned earlier:

A: Excuse me, Ken.  [pre-opener]
B: Hi, Misato. How are you?  [opener]
A: I’m OK. Can I work with you?  [sequencer]
B: Yes, of course. [sequencer]
A: Thank you, Ken. Where did you go last Sunday?  [sequencer]
B: Well, I went shopping.  [sequencer]
A: Oh, did you? Did you buy anything?  [sequencer]
B: No, not really. How about you, Misato?  [sequencer]
A: I went to the museum.  [sequencer]
B: That’s nice. Did you enjoy it?  [sequencer]
A: Yes, very much. OK, I have to go next. [pre-closer]
B: Nice talking to you, Misato.  [pre-closer]
A: Nice talking too, Ken. Bye.  [closer]
B: Bye.  [closer]

As you can see, CRPs, many of which are realized in adjacency pairs, make up a large part of the conversational interaction structuring the conversation as discourse organizers such as a pre-opener (‘Excuse me, Ken.’) and openers (‘Hi, Misato.’), continuers (‘Yes, of course.’), pre-closers (‘I have to go next.’) and closers (‘Bye.’), discourse markers such as a hesitation marker (‘Well’) and a topic-shifter (‘OK’), and social exchanges such as greetings (‘How are you?’). All of them make the whole discourse natural and coherent. We cannot expect, needless to say, our students to be able to do such interactions instantaneously in a day or month in such a successful manner by using CRPs effectively and spontaneously. However, successive practices under a long-term plan will make them be able to successfully do such social and academic interactions in the English classroom.

5. Concluding Remarks

We have argued that English education in Japan has emphasized on the development of not so much competencies actually required in the classroom as those in an unrealistic community for L2 users in general. What we should behold first and foremost is the reality of the EFL classroom in Japan, which is probably the only place where L2 users are exposed to and use the target language for real communicative purposes. On the basis of that beholding, teachers should then make every effort to help their students’ CCC develop by changing the classroom into a real L2 use community as they provide their students with opportunities to use English fluently and spontaneously with the aid of CRPs. We believe such teacher’s effort is a prospective potential, if not the only one, to develop his or her students’ CCC necessary for interactive L2 users of English, and, as a result, to resolve the low efficiency problem we currently have in Japan.

References


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