

To return the horse before the cart
—How can teachers encourage students to produce more output in the second
language? —

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0 Introduction

In today's language education classes, one of the most repeated pieces of advice by teachers is: "Don't be afraid of making errors." As students are often too concerned with possible errors, they refrain from speaking freely in class. Therefore, tricks for successful language teaching today include finding ways to remove this sense of fear from the learner. If the teacher can do so, the students will take care of the rest and start speaking freely and naturally.

This maxim above has certain presuppositions as well as practical implications. Let us first go over some of those presuppositions and practical teaching manners which are entailed in such thinking.

I What the teacher believes

First, teachers like to believe that it is the fear of making errors (often while peers are watching them) that prevents students from speaking in English freely. The fear of making a fool out of oneself is so strong in Japanese culture that students would rather remain quiet, unable to take advantage of their chances to improve language skills, particularly the oral aspect. In addition, the age of students is crucial: most Japanese students start to learn English in junior high school, when they are around the period of puberty and their inhibitions are quite pronounced. These students are always braced for something threatening or someone who might hurt them. With this psychological attitude of students, teachers usually have a hard time to encourage them to come out and speak with ease.

Secondly, the teacher may feel that fear of making errors is a by-product of the school curriculum in Japan. From the onset of English lessons, students are taught grammar, mostly through government approved textbooks, whose contents are grammar-centered. As they progress in these textbooks, students become gradually immersed in the intricacies of grammatical rules. This teaching approach develops in students an inordinate degree of consciousness of grammatical correctness and incorrectness. So, when the time comes for them

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to speak, which often involves production errors of various kinds, they tend to hesitate and feel bogged down by their previous grammar lessons. They are afraid because they are not confident enough to handle the language as impeccably and nicely as they think they should. Unless they can speak exactly like characters in the textbook, they convince themselves that they are not prepared enough to speak and are unwilling to use less accomplished forms. As a result, the teacher's efforts tend to be directed at convincing students into realizing that just the opposite is true with speaking.

Finally, the teacher, as well as the students, may be aware of the unavoidable trap that the current teaching approach leads them into. Even if the teacher advises them to speak out in sentences teeming with errors, the students know that when they make errors in the examination, be it oral or written, they will not get any credit for these. Therefore, not many students are willing to run the risk of speaking out, as they are afraid of getting low marks by committing errors. This fact makes the entire picture muddier, and the teacher's encouragement more anemic.

What underlies the preceding discussion is the belief of teachers that without a sense of fear about making errors, students would be willing to speak out more freely in English. They are competent enough to create sentences on their own, but this sense of fear keeps them from revealing their latent knowledge. Or does it? If this psychological vulnerability is the largest obstacle in the way of speaking freely in a second language, the teacher can, for a change, ask students to express themselves in writing. Unlike speaking, writing is a private endeavor, so students can hide their possible errors from their peers. Few research reports inform us, however, that students' output has tremendously increased when they resorted to writing. Writing is a difficult task on its own, with or without errors. This fact further casts doubts concerning the teacher's presupposition that simply removing the sense of fear will result in an increased amount of output from students.

II Current classroom practice

The presupposition that fear fetters students' output entails certain forms of classroom practice. The teacher, in his or her eagerness, tries to immerse the students in lessons filled with English, thereby having students get used to an English milieu. The idea is that if students are placed in a situation where hearing and speaking English is all but natural, they will not hesitate to use the language themselves. In addition, this kind of practice is in line with Krashen's (1983) input hypothesis theory, which says adequate amounts of input will eventually lead to acquisition which in turn will trigger students' output. The realization of this hypothesis results in classroom practice heavy on verbal messages and explanations in English by the teacher. Using English throughout the lesson is the accepted wisdom of contemporary English teaching in Japan⁽¹⁾.

Fortunately, we have many Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs, hereafter) today. They are young native speakers of English brought to Japan to assist in improving foreign language education, particularly the speaking and listening skills of students. In both junior and senior high schools across the nation, there are plenty of chances to get exposed to the target language

through them. These ALTs work in tandem with their Japanese counterparts. In theory, as well as in practice, students today have many more chances to use English than in the past. Casual visitors of an older generation would be surprised at the sight of English lessons at school being carried out by a native speaker of English, with almost everything in English. Owing to this educational innovation, the general level of English has gone up remarkably—as far as young Japanese teachers of English are concerned (Adachi, Macarthur, & Sheen, 1998). They can handle the language quite skillfully. This suggests that, with prior training in English, young Japanese teachers could rather quickly turn themselves into avid users of the language. Obviously, most teachers have attained a basic command of English at junior and senior high schools, colleges and sometimes graduate schools, often majoring in English. With these backgrounds, young Japanese teachers could benefit most from the presence of ALTs, who might be taken to be their fortuitous private tutors. These changes make English use in class by teachers ever more viable.

III The real problem

What has been pointed out above underlines the possibility that fear of making errors is not something which stands in the way of voluntary output from students. It is at least not the largest obstacle for students to get over. We need to keep in mind that junior and senior high school students are still at the beginning stages of learning the fundamentals of a new language. It is, therefore, a far cry to expect the same level of achievement from them as the young Japanese teachers simply by being taught with an English-centered curriculum for only a limited period of time. The following scripts based on a video-taped lesson at a local high school (one of the most academic high schools in the area) are revealing:

【Utterances by the teacher】	【Responses from the students】	【Notes】
<p>part 3. So please remember. So but Patch entered the medical college, medical college of Virginia. He was very bright student. Of course, he loves clown and humor. So he wanted to be a clown. He wanted to be a clown. What's clown? What's the word from meaning? Please tell me Kato-kun, What is "clown"?</p> <p>So, that's right. Clown is Piero in Japanese. But Piero is French, French word. He wanted to be a clown. So but he had another dream. He had another dream. What was his dream? After he entered the medical college, What did he really want to become? He entered the</p>	<p>S) ピエロ</p>	<p>In Japanese</p>

<p>medical college. What did Patch really want to become? Yamato-san.</p> <p>In English, please.</p> <p>Doctor. That's right. He wanted to be a doctor, so medical doctor. He wanted to be a clown. But he didn't join to the circus. He wanted to be a medical doctor. So next, Please take out your 予習プリント of just part 3. Please take out your 予習プリント. So will you check the answer at first, So at first, please check your answer with your friends. So check your answer with your partner. But please use these phrases. What is you answer from No.1? What answer do you have? I agree with you. I don't think so. My answer is.... So please use these</p>	<p>S)医者</p> <p>S)He wanted to be a doctor.</p>	<p>In Japanese</p> <p>Part in Japanese</p>
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【Chart1: Script from a lesson observed at a local high school, Oct 6, 2005】⁽²⁾

(Iwamoto, 2005)

As we can see above, most of the teacher's efforts fall on deaf ears. The students, no matter what kinds of encouragement are given, remain silent. This indicates that there is more than shyness involved on the learners' side.

While trying to immerse the students in English does not seem to get them anywhere, a similar lack of response from the students is reported in cases where teaching approaches specifically aimed at developing speaking skills are employed. For instance, teachers often deplore the failure of some traditional methods for eliciting output from students in China as well. What follows are some examples of traditional teaching methods in current use in China, accompanied by example responses from some idealized students.

(1) To create a suitable situation

Setting a situation for oral practice does not necessarily require a long and detailed description. The teacher can sometimes use perhaps as brief as one or two sentences to create a realistic situation. Look at the following example:

T: Today we'll practice some polite requests with 'would you,' 'could you' and 'excuse me.'

Now, Mr. A, when you feel rather hot, what would you say to B?

A: Would you please open the window?

B: Yes, of course.

T: (to B) You have lost your pen.
B: Could you lend me your pen, please?
C: Yes, of course.
T: (to C) You want to know the time, but your watch has stopped.
C: Excuse me, What's time is it now?
D: It's ten to two.

Another example would be:

T: We'll practice the use of 'shall' and 'will' today. Now, listen. I'm considering to give you a test tomorrow. I wonder if you are busy or not tomorrow.
S: We'll be very busy tomorrow. We shall have six lessons. The boys will have a football match with Class Three, and the girls will give a performance in the evening.
T: In that case, I'll postpone the test to next week. Now, I'm considering to go sightseeing this Sunday. What does the weather forecast say?
S: It will be fine on Sunday, but it will be rather hot.
T: That'll be fine. Are you going anywhere this Sunday ?
S: No, I have to stay at home. My mother is ill.

In this way, a relevant situation is created. The students could use their imaginations to start their conversations.

(2) To cultivate students' ability to ask questions

Asking questions has its own advantages. On one hand, asking questions can make students full of confidence and can offer them the courage to speak in public. Moreover, asking questions can make students keep abreast of the teacher's thoughts in class. So, cultivating students' ability to ask questions in English could be a useful way to practice students' oral English.

(3) To cultivate a students' ability to retell a story

Oral English learning is connected with memory. Retelling a story is a good way to train one's memory, remembering words and practicing sentence patterns. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of forms when we retell something. One is retelling what is read, and the other is retelling what is heard. The latter way is better. It can train both students' listening ability and their speaking ability. For example, when studying some simple passages, teachers should make students understand the meanings of some words and useful expressions, then ask them to retell the text with these expressions. Through such practice, students' faculty of memory can be improved; some words and expressions in common use can be learned by heart. With the expansion of vocabulary, students will have confidence in speaking English. It is expected that their oral English can be thus improved.

(4) To make oral reports

Every time the lesson starts, the student or student-on-duty will stand up to give a short

report on the date, weather, absentees, etc. In theory, oral reports can be helpful in developing students' oral skills because they are not reciting a text or a dialogue, but are expressing their own thoughts.

In spite of these traditional teaching procedures prevalent in the nation, Chinese students in fact tend to remain silent during the lesson. With regard to China (and Japan, as well), there are several reasons for this failure; one is the environment in which students study English; the second is students' attitudes toward oral skills; last but not least is the absence of better, improved approaches.

Oral communication is a special social activity. The final purpose of foreign language learning is to communicate with others. The ultimate purpose of language learning is to cultivate the ability to communicate. Speaking is the fundamental mode of communication. So speaking is one of the most important skills in English language teaching. Somewhere along the line, everyone makes mistakes in acquiring communication skills. Therefore, teachers in China, just like their counterparts in Japan, believe that it is not important as to whether students speak well or not at the beginning stage; rather, the most important point is for students to dare to open their mouths. The teachers also contend that oral communication focuses on the expression of ideas, and as long as students can communicate with others, some mistakes can be ignored. And yet, many students keep silent most of the time, though teachers repeatedly speak English in class.

(Wang and Kaheiran, 2010, personal communication)

Here we are reminded time and again that it is the teacher who does most of the talking, both in Japan and China. Also, we can see that encouragement by the teacher is regrettably of not much use in terms of eliciting responses from students. Further, even with carefully prepared teaching procedures which China has been employing, it is not easy to get students to become involved in active interaction in the second language. These facts force us to suspect that the teacher needs something other than incessant talking to encourage students to get over their fear of making errors before producing utterances, no matter how error-ridden they may be.

To reiterate the point made above using more technical terms, what is required here is a specific way to assist students in eliciting output with their as yet underdeveloped interlanguage system. In planning a more productive approach, we ought to pay attention to the level of readiness of students and to specific scaffolding most suitable for the students at that level. Thus, the real problem lies more with practical support than with encouraging comments or incessant speech in English by the teacher. Specifically, we must take into consideration the sequence whereby output is to be made as well as the language units that students can realistically handle in forming utterances. Regarding language units, Adachi (2009b) explicates the theoretical ground of Widdowson's (1989) hypothesis and proposes chunks as the most viable language unit for output practice. Before delineating some of the

advantages and features of chunks, we might as well compare them with exercises relying on either isolated words or sentences. In principle, these underlie traditional teaching approaches prevalent both in Japan and China.

For instance, let us use a sentence taken from a junior high school course book currently in use in Japan: “You use many languages in India⁽³⁾.” (For the sake of simplicity, we will use only one example sentence here.) Having learned the sentence, the students can be asked to manipulate the target sentence in order to create some new forms. If the approach taken is word-based, the students will have a certain flexibility in producing a number of novel sentences such as “In India, you use many languages.” On the other hand, too much freedom may play havoc with the language form, resulting in such non-sense sequences as “Use you in many India languages.” With the six words used in the example sentence above, there are theoretically 720 different sequences possible, many of which would be neither intelligible nor accurate. This illustrates the fact that linguistic creativity is often in inverse proportion to intelligibility and/or accuracy. This example also indicates that students, left unassisted, may not utter a word primarily because they find it overwhelming to combine the words they have learned into a coherent whole. The students simply cannot think of any meaningful sequences out of an almost infinite number of possible combinations: the failure in forming a meaningful utterance, therefore, does not have much to do with fear.

The same relationship can be observed from the opposite direction. If the approach taken is sentence-based as in Pattern Practice, the student will run little risk of making outlandish errors. The sentence approach often asks students to replace one or two words in the sentence with others, keeping the sentence pattern intact. So, resulting sentences might look like, for instance, “You use many languages in Europe,” or “They use many languages in Europe,” and so on and so forth. These sentence samples show that the student can produce meaningful sequences, but also that there is very little to be said in terms of linguistic creativity. The students will more or less repeat what they have memorized. This fact explains that most of the utterances by students in class amount to no more than repetition and imitation of the teacher. However, these alone will not enhance the students’ “procedural knowledge of the second language” (Yamaoka, 2005, 2006), as the failure of Pattern Practice well testifies. The sentence-based approach does very little to aid in developing linguistic creativity, keeping students from forming and trying out many original sentences.

IV Theories on chunks and their usefulness

Chunks can be expected to bridge the gap between uncontrolled creativity and unproductive sentence imitation. They turn out to be an excellent scaffolding for students.

Chunks have been examined in a number of studies in the past, and their definition varies from study to study (Weinert, 1995). Chunks in this and other related papers have the following features:

- (1) They are all parts of sentences taken from passages in government-approved junior high school textbooks that students use in school.

- (2) Each chunk more or less corresponds to a phrase in a sentence marked by a pause in oral reading.
- (3) Each chunk has a length of two to five words in length.
- (4) Each chunk can be spoken as if it were one lexical item.
- (5) Each chunk is accompanied by a fixed meaning expressed in Japanese.
- (6) As they are originally taken from textbooks, all chunks are context-dependent.
- (7) Most chunks are to be easily combined with one another to formulate utterances expressing new statements.
- (8) Each chunk can be employed in the way mentioned above without being further segmented into smaller morpho-syntactic units.

While employing chunks, students can be engaged in several types of activities whose purposes are somewhat overlapping and yet independent from each other in orientation.

According to Weinert (ibid.), chunks serve three purposes: a communicative function, a production function, and a learning strategy function. The communicative function of chunks allows the student to enter the communication act by using such phrases as *How do you do?* *Pardon me, I see, Me too*, and so on. With the production function, the student can organize a statement by the use of chunks within a constraint of limited intervals. When students resort to chunks, they can form sentences faster than when they try to juggle and assemble every single word into a coherent whole with grammar rules. Chunks could therefore lead students to improved fluency. In the third function of learning strategy, the student could eventually “unpack” the chunk in order to derive a grammatical rule underlying the chunk.

As Weinert admits, it is sometimes difficult to make a clear distinction among the three purposes above: a communicative purpose obviously encompasses a production purpose while production purposes, in the long run, entail learning strategies. Therefore, in this study, the first two purposes of communication and production are grouped into one category, leaving the learning strategy to be delineated in subsequent studies.

In addition to the advantages of chunks shown by Weinert, we can appreciate the usefulness of chunks from the standpoint of second language learners in particular as is illustrated below.

Let us again use the example “You use many languages in India.” This sequence can be most likely segmented into three chunks as in “You use/ many languages/ in India.” Generally speaking, these chunks correspond to thought groups or breath groups in reading aloud. Thus the approach based on chunks is closely tied to reading aloud exercises imbedded in English lessons in Japan. Now what the student is required to do with these three chunks is to reorganize them into a new sequence. With the example sentence here, the number of possible combinations is five:

- (1) Many languages you use in India
- (2) Many languages in India you use
- (3) In India you use many languages

- (4) In India many languages you use
- (5) You use in India many languages

Obviously, some of these are less intelligible than others. Nonetheless, there are no examples here which might altogether confound the reader or listener. At the same time, if the learner combines two or more chunks taken from different target sentences, he or she can improvise novel sentences, which allows the teacher “to conclude that new knowledge has been created through a search of the learner’s own existing knowledge, there being no other source” (Swain, 2005:474). It is primarily this aspect that signals a departure from customary Pattern Practice activities. Real communicative competence is a result of creative skills, not imitation skills. This aspect will be further explored in the next section.

V HF, HT and the notion of approximation

Capitalizing on Swain’s theory, Adachi (2009a) proposed specific ‘large grammar’ activities in which students manipulate given chunks in order to formulate their own hypothesis. This is what is called the function of hypothesis formation (HF, hereafter). The hypothesis thus created will be realized either through speaking or writing at the next stage of hypothesis testing (HT, hereafter). Through HT, students can indicate to others such as ALTs that they have indeed made a hypothesis. During these phases, students are said to be engaged in practice of making an output on their own, as they would do in a real communicative situation. Moreover, these activities provide teachers with the opportunity in which they can come in and assist students. One of the most important obligations of teachers is to assist students in HF and HT through various teaching devices, which ought to be theoretically grounded and practically workable. In other words, the first objective the teacher should be concerned with is not encouraging students to overcome their fear of possible errors but showing them how to make utterances which may be erroneous, yet well-formed enough to be intelligible. Sentences with errors may not be so clear in meaning but definitely creative in their orientation. Only when they can produce this error-ridden output successfully, can they for the first time forget about their possible fear as well. In this sense, the conventional wisdom of teachers has put the cart before the horse. We need to return the horse before the cart in order to improve the teaching of increasing output in the second language.

As mentioned above, both HF and HT more often than not result in errors. However, HF and HT do not aspire to produce a final product, meaning grammatically impeccable output. Rather, the functions of HF and HT bear on the notion of approximation. Approximation or generalities here mean less than a perfect sentence form to express one’s intention or meaning. Students are expected at this initial stage to express themselves in (grammatically) approximate sentences. This argument might well be illustrated by referring to the way people draw a picture of, say, someone’s face. In drawing the face of someone, people usually start with a general contour of the face first; drawing a quick oval line indicating the contour of the face, adding to it a vertical line in the middle of the egg-shaped contour, and adding to it a horizontal line across the contour in order to decide the positions of the eyes and ears, and so on

and so forth. These are probably the procedures people usually follow in drawing a model's face. What people tend to avoid is to start with small details such as drawing eyelashes before the general contour has been established. In a similar way, what students should be doing first in this approach is to make utterances which may not be well-formed yet could convey to varying degrees their intended messages. Just as nobody would call the initial general contour of a face an 'error,' so it would be inappropriate to consider the initial utterances of learners as 'errors.' Thus, we might just as well keep in mind that initial utterances of the learner ought to be characterized as approximate but not necessarily as erroneous.

VI Conclusion

The conventional wisdom held by teachers turn out to be wrong in two senses. In one sense, it misleads teachers into believing that the hardest obstacle to successful output by students lies with psychological reasons. Then, this misconception invites a teaching approach aimed at immersing learners in an English environment.

The wisdom being wrong, however, teacher's efforts fail to bring much change in students' behavior in the classroom or in their output productivity. Therefore, in this presentation, we started by looking at the conventional wisdom once more. In addition, we compared the word-based approach and the Pattern Practice-type of exercises for sentence production with the chunk-oriented approach. As a result, both near-unlimited and very limited possibilities for new sentence sequences seem to be the cause for undermining student's voluntary speech. In contrast, the chunk-based approach is shown to bridge the gap between the two extremes. Furthermore, through this approach, we have seen that sentences which have been formerly categorized as erroneous ought to be reconsidered as being approximate or general. As far as output practice is concerned, the notion of error ought to be replaced with that of approximation. This view reminds us of the way people draw pictures. When both teachers and students realize that erroneous utterances are not really errors but examples of approximation, students' sense of fear will go away from the educational scenes of Japan and China.

Notes:

- (1) According to *The Asahi* (December 23, 2008), the Japanese Ministry of Education will launch a new program for high school English education in 2013. One of its featured improvements is to offer, in principle, all English lessons in English.
- (2) Notes have been added by the authors of this article.
- (3) *New Crown English . 2*, Lesson 6, 3.

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【日本語要旨】

第2 言語による発話の促進と発話時におけるエラー概念の転換 ——日本と中国の実態から——

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日本でも中国でも、生徒が第二言語で発話できない主な原因は誤りに対する恐怖心や恥の感覚が妨害するからだと考えられてきた。そこで英語教師たちは、まず自分たちが率先して英語を話すことにより教室内で英語を使うことが極めて自然になるように努めてきた。同様に、発話をなるべく自然に促進させるための指導法も数多く試されてきている。このような授業や指導法を通して、生徒たちには誤りを恐れることなく積極的に英語で話すよう奨励してきたのである。しかしこれまでの教育実践を見ると、どちらの国でも期待されるような成果は上がっていない。

教育現場の状況や生徒の英語力を検討すると、生徒たちが発話しないのは、間違えるのが恥ずかしいといった心理的な要因のみによるのではないことが理解される。より大きな原因は、文生成のための基礎的な能力の欠如、あるいは、暗記・模倣と生成のギャップに関わる問題などにあるのだ。

本稿では、このような問題を克服し発話を促す方法として、Widdowson らが指摘したチャンクと Swain の提唱した仮説生成を柱とした理論的枠組みを提唱している。また、初期の発話時にはつきものの error とは、実は approximation の例として見る方がより正しいことも主張している。日本であれ中国であれ、学習者のコミュニケーション能力を養成するためには、発話量を増加させることが不可欠である。そのためには、本稿で述べたような発話を支援するための有効な方法をさらに発展させ、かつ発話時の error に対する概念を根本的に転換することが必要となるのである。