

Observations on English Reading Classes in Japanese Tertiary Education

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This paper analyzes scope and sequence of college English classes in Japan through observations of lesson reports. A lesson has a recognizable structure. It begins in a particular way, proceeds through a series of instructing and learning activities and reaches a conclusion. Investigating more than thirty lesson reports, this paper points out some aspects of the class process in chains of activities. It explains what kinds of activities are useful for students at the lower levels of second-language proficiency to direct their attention to communication in class.

Key Words : EFL, reading class, activity, classroom research

1 Introduction

If a class is not conducted successfully, a means which pays attention to students needs must be contrived to make the class a success. Instructors in English at a university employ a variety of alternative teaching strategies and activities in their classes. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the strategies and activities that solve the problems instructors have and aid them in executing the class successfully in view of the reflections written in lesson reports, the form of which is published in *Daigaku Eigo Kyooiku Gakkai Zyugyoogaku Kenkyuu Inukai* (2007). The following items are filled out in the report: goals or objectives of the course, student levels in English proficiency, a required or elective course, language used in class, features of students, class size, materials, audiovisual aids or teaching tools, classroom events or instructor and student behaviors with allocated time, assessment, reflection, etc.

An impressive amount of scholarship has been devoted to the topic of scope and sequence in English classes in junior and senior high schools in Japan (Hatano 1963; Kaneda 1986; Sato 1977; Takahashi, Yoneyama, and Sano 1978; Takanashi 1977; Tsuchiya 1977). However, very little has been written on those of college classes, although English classes are carried out by instructors at universities in an EFL context. It is not known precisely how college English class scope and sequence are arranged within their given ninety minutes. This paper describes how classes are organized as chains of activities.

In the next chapter, I will illustrate scope and sequence of four lessons, each of which has a sense of

coherence with useful activities as a whole and over which the instructor has control. The activities observed in teaching and learning should relate to the objectives of the course. They have to be achieved to match the intended purposes and goals. The lesson reports in this study have been selected from classes categorized as reading classes. These four reports have been selected from a large number of reports investigated as they best illustrate the purpose of this paper. Each takes a different teaching approach and scope and sequence in each are quite different. Materials also deal with different varieties of English as they are taken from current topics, a manual, and a novel. In looking over the lesson reports, the following items have been considered: goals or objectives of the course, student levels in second-language proficiency, characteristics of the students, class size, allocated time schedule, activities of instructors' guidance and students' learning, materials, audiovisual aids or teaching tools, and reflection.

In chapter three, some problems arising from the individual differences of the students in the lesson reports are analyzed. These arose from students' lower levels of second-language proficiency and the consciousness of their English level. Therefore, activities described to effectively solve the problems in the reflection section of the lesson report are mentioned. Another point in the chapter is that each activity to motivate students is described and all the reported activities are examined in regard to their allocated time, and a summary of the observations described in the lesson reports is presented.

2 Lesson Structures

Research in the area of college English class analysis yields interesting results. In Richards (1996), he describes the reflective approach to teaching as follows:

One in which teachers and student teachers collect data about teaching, examine their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and teaching practices, and use the information obtained as a basis for critical reflection about teaching . . . It can help achieve a better understanding of one's own assumptions about teaching as well as one's own teaching practices; it can lead to a richer conceptualization of teaching and learning processes; and it can serve as a basis for self-evaluation and is therefore an important component of professional development. (1-2)

He states that " a lesson report describes what happened from the teacher's point of view " and that its purpose is " to give the teacher a simple procedure for regularly monitoring what happened during a lesson, how much time was spent on different parts of a lesson, and how effective the lesson was "(9).

Activity sequences and time allotment schedules for specific lessons are described below.

2 . 1 Miyama's lesson of reading a manual text

In this section I will describe Miyama's lesson of reading a manual text published in *Daigaku Eigo Kyooiku Gakkai Zyugyoogaku Kenkyuu Iinkai* (2007: 194-95). This class is designed to understand basic

English as an intellectual property. According to the report, it was delivered to fifty students whose average TOEIC score was 350. Since the class was not streamed according to students' English proficiency, the levels ranged from elementary to high intermediate. Below you can find the class structure with the amount of time elapsed.

Table 1 Sequence of Activities and Allocated Time in Miyama 's Lesson

0-20 min.	Have students read a copy of the manual text and discover rules.
20-30 min.	Elicit rules from students.
30-50 min.	Share rules in the manual text.
50-80 min.	Define vocabulary and explain grammar points which often occur in English and Japanese manuals.
80-90 min.	Test students on the lesson content.

The lesson is divided into four activities which focus on discovering rules, sharing rules, applying the rules and a quiz. To begin the lesson, copies of the manual text are distributed for students to read and discover rules. The text is authentic material, such as the operation manual for a watch or a copier. In the next ten minutes, students raise their hands at will to comment on rules such as itemization, noun phrase expressions, and the imperative mood in front of the class. Afterwards other rules are added in English which the students did not notice, for a period of twenty minutes. Then, extracting some expressions from the authentic manual, the instructor presents vocabulary and grammar points which often appear in English and Japanese manuals. By guiding students to notice that there are expressions of fixed manual formulas in Japanese, the instructor links the content with the students' own experience. Finally students are asked to answer a quiz to check on content retention for that day.

2 . 2 Taura 's lesson to cultivate receptive skills

Next, Taura's lesson to cultivate receptive skills is introduced which is in *Daigaku Eigo Kyooiku Gakkai Zyugyoogaku Kenkyuu linkai* (2007: 76-77). This class is to enhance skill transfer from reading to listening. According to his report, it was conducted with thirty-five students whose average TOEFL score was 399. The class structure and the allocated time schedule are shown below.

Table 2 Sequence of Activities and Allocated Time in Taura 's Lesson

0-30min.	Check students' prepared sight translation.
30-45min.	Have students practice consecutive interpretation of a paragraph.
45-60min.	Have students practice again using another paragraph.
60-70min.	Test students on the lesson content.

Here Taura divides the lesson into three parts which focus on translating at sight, practicing consecutive interpretation, and a quiz. The lesson is begun by going over the sight translation prepared

by the students. They are obligated to submit a section of their translation of the English text. They are made to raise their hands to read the translation in front of the class, and are corrected orally. Next, practicing consecutive interpretation is undertaken using two paragraphs of the text. The process is as follows: First, narration of the paragraphs with longer pauses at each sense group is prepared on a mini disk, which is a magneto-optical disk. These pauses give students more time to process what is said and hence facilitate their comprehension. Secondly, students are made to work in pairs to check each other's shadowing, repeating, and translating at the pause. While translating from the top of the sentence, the instructor advises them that their output should not be clumsy word-for-word translations. Thirdly, Japanese translation of the paragraph is read with pauses for the students to translate every Japanese sense group into equivalent English. Finally, students take a test on the lesson content with a listening exercise to fill in the blanks and a sight translation of the two paragraphs practiced in class into Japanese.

2.3 Matsuda's lesson of reading through a paperback

In this section Matsuda's lesson of reading through a paperback is taken from *Daigaku Eigo Kyooiku Gakkai Zyugyogaku Kenkyuu Iinkai* (2007: 234-35). This lesson contained use of a drama method linked to the text *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. According to the report, it was delivered to twelve students whose TOEIC scores ranged from 300 to 450. The class structure with the amount of time elapsed is illustrated below.

Table 3 Sequence of Activities and Allocated Time in Matsuda's Lesson

0-10min.	Quiz to go through the previous homework.
10-25min.	Ask for a summary of the assigned story.
25-45min.	Guide students to grasp the meaning of the text and situations by asking questions.
45-65min.	Have students read aloud and role-play dialogue from the text.
65-75min.	Have students watch the video.
75-90min.	Have students read aloud and role-play dialogue from the film script.
90 min.	Have students summarize the story.

The lesson is divided into five activities which focus on a quiz, a summary, watching the video, oral reading and role-playing. At the beginning of the class, the instructor checks by a quiz if students have completed the assignment of reading three chapters of the paperback. In the next fifteen minutes, a summary of the story is asked for from two appointed students. After grasping the meaning of the text and situations, students read aloud and role-play the dialogue between grandfather and grandson in the text for twenty minutes. Then they watch the corresponding scene on video to stimulate awareness of gestures and body language. Students are also given the script of the scene. Since the lines are shorter, they learn them and act them out in front of the class. After having practiced a conversation in which

certain sentence patterns are used in the text, students perform a role-play in which they are able to use the gestures and body language as observed in the video. Students write down the similarities and differences between the text and the video to conclude the class. In this class, the students are given many opportunities to take part in the activities with enthusiasm.

2 . 4 Imanishi 's lesson to read English for current affairs

Finally I will take up Imanishi 's lesson to read English for current affairs in *Daigaku Eigo Kyoouiku Gakkai Zyugyogaku Kenkyuu Iinkai* (2007: 60-61). Audiovisual aids, a handout and an article from *The Student Times* are used in addition to the textbook in this class. According to the report, it was conducted with thirty-five students whose TOEIC score was about 550. Below you can find the class structure with the amount of time elapsed.

Table 4 Sequence of Activities and Allocated Time in Imanishi 's Lesson

0-5min.	Return the quiz and assignment individually.
5-20min.	Review and comment on problems students had with the English structures.
20-35min.	Ask students to work in groups to discuss important events in the last week.
35-50min.	Have students watch the news relevant to the topic.
50-60min.	Present keywords and the summary in a handout.
60-65min.	Have students watch the news again.
65-85min.	Have students read the relevant article rapidly and translate at sight.

The lesson is divided into four activities which focus on reviewing, watching the video, presenting key words and summary. First the quiz and assignment of the previous week are returned to the students individually. The instructor responds to some translations in the assignment to emphasize the model sentences and comments on problems students had with the English structures. After reviewing the previous lesson, the instructor asks the students to work in a group to talk about important events in the last week, and then mentions topical issues to make connections with the Iraqi War, which was the topic of that day. Then watching the ABC Nightline News about a sovereignty handover to an Iraqi junta, the instructor summarizes and distributes a handout to cite keywords used in the news. They watch the news again. Finally the news article of 320-350 words is handed out for rapid reading and sight translation.

3 Reflection and discussions

The results of the lesson and the problems to be solved are reflected on in the lesson reports. Moreover, since the statements can be used for the solution of similar problems which other instructors have, reflection is essential to make various improvements in general.

Next I would like to mention the strategies and activities the instructors took to help enforce the students' comprehension in class. Some strategies and activities are reported to prepare students at lower

levels of English proficiency for reading the text positively. The instructors provide the context, introduce background information including audiovisual aids, and introduce new expressions and grammar clearly, explaining the meaning of the text, and asking questions to signpost the students. Going one stage further, we notice that the teaching tools are also used to adjust the content of the activities to match the levels of the students' comprehension, such as a handout citing key words of a newspaper article and audiovisual aids. These activities vary to the extent to which they lead to a particular learning result or outcome.

Other activities are reported to overcome students' consciousness of difficulty in English. These include sight translation, pair work, and quizzes executed just after the pair work. Sight translation is a training method which is conducted as part of practice in consecutive interpretation. This new method for the students seems to interest them and help them make more practical applications of language skills than they have already acquired. Although their answers might not always be right working in pairs, according to Matsuda's reflection in the lesson report, all students are positively involved in the lesson and enjoy it. Richards (1996) would agree that for these students "reading was a shared activity conducted collaboratively in pairs or groups" (58).

The patterns of scope and sequence result from the instructor's attempts to manage the teaching process in a way which will optimize the amount of learning which takes place in the allocated time. Figure 1 indicates how much time is spent for each activity, since "the formats used for most language lessons consist of a sequence of sub-activities which address the overall goals of the lesson, deciding how much time to allocate to each sub-activity is an important issue in teaching" (Richards 1996: 122).

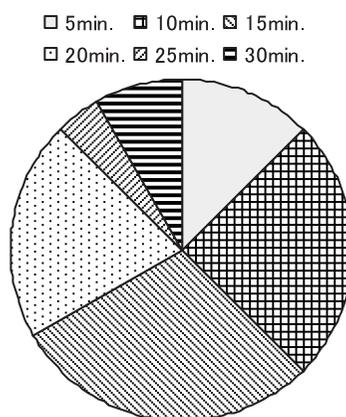


Figure 1 Proportion of the time spent on each activity in the study

Figure 1 illustrates that the activities lasting fifteen minutes account for one-fourth of the time for all activities; they are, practicing consecutive interpretation of a paragraph, asking for a summary of the assigned story, reading aloud and role-play dialogue from the video, working in groups to discuss

important events, and watching the news, and those which continue for ten minutes to twenty minutes amount to three-fourths. These include a quiz, watching the video, and presenting key words and a summary, for a period of ten minutes, and reading and sharing rules in the manual text, reading the article rapidly, and grasping the meaning of the text and situations, for a period of twenty minutes.

4 Conclusion

Through the analysis of scope and sequence of four college English reading classes, it should be concluded that 10-20 minute activities occupy three-fourths of the whole. Various activities are planned to support the goals in the lessons and they are common in respect to directing the students' interest. Activities including audiovisual aids, which make use of pre-existing knowledge and context rather than emphasizing a word-by-word reading activity, are effective for students at lower levels of second-language proficiency to participate in class with enthusiasm.

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