

Getting Japanese Children to Make Use of Naturally-sounding English in the Classroom

Junko Yamamoto

ju_fat_pop06.odn.ne.jp

Nagaoka National College of Technology (Nagaoka, Japan)

As English conversation teachers for young children, my teaching partner Machiko Owada and I have made an effort to give children a lot of input and opportunities for output through communication based approaches and team teaching.

Usually "team teaching" for English classes in Japan refers to the teaching in pair by Japanese teachers of English and Assistant English (language) teachers, who are native speakers of English. One of the strongest points of the team teaching is that teachers can present new phrases and songs with minimum use of Japanese. We try to incorporate this merit by one teacher playing the role of the English-only speaker while the other using a little Japanese when necessary. By seeing and hearing two teachers using the target phrases in situations understandable to children, children would be able to guess the meaning correctly.

In preparing activities such as games, writing practices and singing songs we see to it that children can use such target phrase(s) in natural situations. Although we encourage them to use English whenever possible, they do use Japanese casually as they do outside the classroom. So we thought if they know how to say it in English and we keep on encouraging them to express those feelings in English, their total amount of output would increase dramatically.

This belief prompted us to record the Japanese used by of our students during the lessons.

We have two classes; the younger students (first graders and under) and the older students. Our subjects this time were the older students; three fourth graders and four third graders. After all the recordings, we wrote down every Japanese utterance. (Actually, there was not so much Japanese as a result of our English only policy.) After eliminating rare utterances (those which were uttered only once), we have collected the following fifty expressions.

- Aah yokatta - Thank goodness./ What a relief
- Areda - That one./ That's it.
- Atari - Right. Bingo.
- Atta - Here it is.
- Boku ga saisho ni yaru - I go first.
- Chosen suru - I'll give it a try.
- Chotto matte - Hold on. / Wait a minute.
- Dameda - No good.
- Dou yaru no? - How do I do that?
- Eeh to - Let me see.
- Gambare - Hurrah for ... Come on....
- Hayaku, hayaku (to classmates) - Hurry up.
- Hazure - Wrong./ You lose.
- Hi, kore - Here you are.
- Ieru yo/Dekiru yo - I can say it./I can do it.
- Junban da yo - Let's take turns.
- Kantan - It's easy.
- Kashite - Please lend me....
- Katta - I won.
- Kimi ga oni da - You are it.
- Kondoha katou - We will win next time.
- Kore eigo de nante iuno? - What's this in English?

- Kou yaru no? - Like this?
- Kousan - I give up.
- Kumi ni naru - I team up with....
- Machigaeta - I got it wrong.
- Mada - Not yet.
- Maketa - I lost.
- Mou yatte ii? - Can I start now?
- Mouikkai itte - Once more, please.
- Mouikkai yarou - Let's do it again.
- Nani, sore? - What's that?
- Nante itte iruno? - What do you mean?
- Omoidashita - I remember.
- Otetsuki - You touched the wrong card.
- Owatta - I'm finished./ We've done.
- Renshu shi yo - Let's practice.
- Sensei - Excuse me. / Mrs. Yamamoto
- Shitsumon - I have a question.
- Tsuite nai - What bad luck! No luck.
- Umai - Well done.
- Wakaranai - I don't understand./ I don't get it.
- Wakatta - I got it. I see.
- Wasureta - I forgot.
- Watashi no ban - It's my turn
- Yamete (to a classmate) - Cut it out.
- ... yarou - Let's do...
- Yattah - Wonderful./ Great.
- Youi don! / Sei no! - Ready, set, go!
- Zurui - That's not fair./ Don't cheat.

This list has been useful in that both teachers and children can share most of these phrases and share the same experiences.

Throughout the lesson with games, songs and short dramas teachers intentionally used these expressions whenever possible and used "today's target expression(s)" chosen from the above list extensively. Our aim is to let the children express their needs and feelings in English all the time during the class.

In one lesson, two of the target phrases we have chosen from the list were, "What's this in English?"(Kore Eigo de nante iuno?) and "I have a question."(Shitsumon.) The following is how these target phrases were introduced in the lesson.

We draw children's attention by pointing to a strange-looking stuffed animal after correctly pointing to other animals and said,

- Teacher 1: "Hmmm...I forgot. Junko-san, what's this in English?"
- Teacher 2: "An armadillo."
- Teacher 1: "Oh, right, an armadillo!" "Now, Machiko-san, I have a question. What's this in English?" (and pointed to a funny looking "Pokemon".)
- Teacher 2: "Gee, I don't know."
- Children: "Lizardon da-yo."
- Teachers: "Oh, yes, now we remember. It's Lizardon! Thanks."

After asking them a few questions like the above and asking a couple of children individually, we let each child ask the teachers one by one. Each one pointed to some objects in the classroom they wanted to say in English.

In a different lesson, the target phrase was, "Let's take turns." (Junban da yo.)

- Teacher 1: "What does "take turns" mean?"
- Teacher 2: "That means we do it by turns." Then we demonstrated how we take turns.

If there are children who still look puzzled, my partner would go to them and tell them the meaning in Japanese.

These expressions and others in the list are what we call, "Classroom English for elementary students". This is different from classroom English for junior high and high schools in many ways.

Elementary students usually have no or little inhibition when speaking. They are likely to say and do things quite spontaneously. Although we order them to raise their hand and wait for their turn, they tend to say things out of turn trying to be the first to be noticed. For this reason, a lot of casual, informal expressions are included.

Kids generally wish to be paid much attention to whether in first language acquisition (L1) or second language acquisition (L2). Just as L1, L2 acquisition becomes faster if we put more emphasis on casual remarks learners make to call for others' attention. McTear in discussing children's L1 acquisition said that "the acquisition of particular linguistic forms is often motivated by a requirement to communicate more effectively."

A similar statement was made about L2 acquisition. Hatch and Brown pointed out that "In addition to interest, actual need may make a difference in whether encountered words are learned. We seem to learn words more quickly if we have felt a need for them in some way. ...When the teacher supplied the second language words for the concept, the students readily picked them up... " In a classroom situation classroom English contains a lot of basic but important phrases which meet their "actual need".

As children grow older, speech becomes more sophisticated. In other words, they grow out of certain speeches. Also the same can be said about L2 acquisition, I believe. As language teachers, we feel responsible for helping them acquire many English expressions while they are actually using them.

We found one child's success in expressing in English will soon lead to another child's success. Use of classroom English for young children seems to be contagious. If a whole lesson is conducted all in English, the amount of total output will increase accordingly. Although we have not reached this point yet children are starting to use these expressions in great numbers. The list is getting longer and longer.

Besides using such expressions during the class, we make it a fun to acquire classroom English. Teachers have made a set of fifty cards for games. On the front side, Japanese expressions are written. On the back side, English equivalents are written. With these we can play various fun card games

Our principle is to let children acquire language through "fun" and a lot of comprehensible inputs and outputs.

Conclusion

Instead of forcing children to use English expressions, we try to let children use them voluntarily. And instead of correcting mistakes on the spot, we draw their attention to correct use by giving them a lot of inputs through our model conversations.

Second language acquisition for Japanese children may be slow, as they do not have a lot of chances to actually use English. We hope to make the process a little faster, however, by paying attention to them, listening to them, asking them, responding to them to bring out their potential communicative competence. These can be done much more effectively through team teaching than alone.

References

- McTear, M. (1985) *Children's Conversation*: Basil Blackwell
- Hatch, E., Brown, C. (1995) *Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education*; Cambridge