

REAL English 1: Applying research in coach-player communications in the classroom

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[Abstract]

For the advancement of Japan's global human resources in sport and physical education, English language learners must have greater access to authentic and relevant language learning resources. Through analyses of audio and video recordings of instruction at ice hockey player development and conditioning camps in Canada between 2010 and 2013, common and recurrent language was identified and applied in sports English language lessons targeting the natural production of the target language. This particular lesson, based on a 2010 recording, aimed to confirm the assumption that learners would demonstrate increased motivation, attentiveness and natural language production through language learning activities based on these authentic materials. During the lesson, learners were observed to apply various combinations of the target language in performing original instruction, and demonstrated the transfer of linguistic and sports-based comprehension in completing the activities. For future study, the lesson needs to be attempted with additional classes and learners of varying ability, and needs to include native English speakers among the Japanese learners in order to more accurately evaluate the Japanese learners' actual English communicative proficiency.

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オーセンティックな英語1:コーチと選手間のコミュニケーション研究の授業への応用

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キーワード: スポーツ英語、観察調査、コミュニケーション重視の言語教育、
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【要旨】

スポーツ・体育分野におけるグローバル人材を日本で育成するためには、日本人英語学習者はオーセンティックで自分に関連のある言語学習教材にもっと触れなくてはならない。2010年から2013年にカナダのアイスホッケー選手育成・コンディショニング合宿で録音・録画したコーチの指導の分析により、コーチの出す指示の中で頻出する言葉を見つけ出し、それらを目標言語としてスポーツ英語の授業を実施した。授業の目標は、学習者が目標言語を自然に生み出して発話することとした。特に本稿で述べる授業は2010年の録音・録画に基づいている。本研究は、これらのオーセンティックな教材を用いた言語活動により、学習者の学習に対する意欲・集中力及び言語活動中の自然な言語生成が増すであろうという仮定を確かめることを目的とした。当該授業中、学習者が独自の指示を出す際に、目標言語をさまざまに組み合わせて用いる様子が観察された。また、学習者は言語活動を行う際に、言語やスポーツに関する既存の知識を用いていることも分かった。今後の研究では、当該授業をさまざまなレベルの他のクラスで実施してみる必要がある。また、日本人学習者の実際の英語コミュニケーション能力をより正確に評価するため、複数の英語母語話者に授業に入ってもらふ必要がある。

Related language theory and rationale

Japan has a long history of English language education. While grammar-translation and other paper-friendly approaches continue to be largely favored by Japanese instructors of English (and the education system as a whole), recent concessions regarding the extensive lack of overall success of Japanese students with learning English, especially with regards to communicative proficiency, have contributed to an increased awakening in the value of communicative English language teaching in stimulating language learners (see MEXT, 2011). Numerous theories recognize the value of communication and interaction in EFL teaching methodology, with each, however, differing somewhat in theory and/or practice, from the specific focus of this research. Some of these theories and theorists focus on the analysis and classification of communicative language and learning in understanding language use (for example, Bales, 1950; Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Ellis, 2005; Kramsch, 1993/2010; Levinson, 1979; Mackey and Goo, 2007/2012; Schiffrin, 1994; Yamashita, 2002), while others align themselves with measures of competence and ability in negotiating social interactions and communicative tasks (for example, Allwright, 1977; Mackey, 2007/2012; Taylor, 1987; Young, 2011). The product of this particular research shares largely in the values and merits of task-based learning (TBL) and the more eclectically defined and understood Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which overlap greatly in their own right, and has borrowed selectively from various other approaches to foreign language communicative teaching.

While the overall rationale for this research shares in many of the defining principles and characteristics of both TBL and CLT, it more specifically reflects the guiding objective of advancing the practical language capabilities of English language learners involved in sport in Japan through materials created from observational recordings of sports camps.

Table 1 Shared characteristics of TBL and CLT

- learners need frequent exposure to meaningful real-world contexts that necessitate communication
- communicative contexts are developed from learner need
- learners are motivated through the use of authentic language that necessitates communication
- authentic resources are integral in the learning process
- meaningful contexts and learner creativity in production contribute to learning
- freedom from language control encourages learning

The materials target specific items of language in use through the analysis of coach-player communications, and this target language comprises the basis for all subsequent language learning and communicative activities in the lessons. Although learners are encouraged to freely manipulate the target language in communication, the target language items identified through analysis are the primary focus for study and production as they embody authentic communicative language in use by native speaking sports instructors.

Accordingly, these materials rely on an amalgamation of the aforementioned theories and approaches in order to best help learners to:

- 1) recognize and understand the target language in context
- 2) facilitate the transfer of prior knowledge (language and sport) through expanded comprehension (linguistic and sport)
- 3) increase proficiency and competency (linguistic and instructional) through practical sports-based communicative activities

The aim is to use authentic sports-based resources to create a series of lessons which will help foster individuals capable of functioning effectively on an international stage through, as Belchamber (2007) explains, “equipping students with vocabulary, structures and functions, as well as strategies, to enable them to interact successfully.”

The lessons aim to provide learners with:

- 1) exposure to authentic materials
- 2) greater opportunities to negotiate real and relevant situations that necessitate communication
- 3) increased motivation through authentic sports-based language and communicative strategies

The assumption is that communicative language materials created from current and sports-relevant observational recordings will motivate students to learn the target language to actively engage in their own English language instruction. Moreover, it is expected that in the final part of the lesson learners will apply prior linguistic, instructional, and sport-based knowledge to assist them in producing and performing an original instructional sequence.

Methods

To confirm the aforementioned assumptions (i.e., educational materials created from current and sports-relevant observational recordings will contribute to increased learner motivation and facilitate the transfer of linguistic and sport-based knowledge), naturalistic observational research recordings of an ice hockey sports camp were used to create this 90-minute lesson plan (Appendix 1) for students of a national sports

university in Japan. This section presents a general overview of the lesson contents, followed by a brief description of each of the activities included in the actual lesson.

Lesson overview

The content of the lesson plan is based on a transcription of a video recording ([Appendix 3](#)) taken at the 2010 Bruce Bell Hockey School: Super Skills Camp in Lethbridge, Canada. The partial transcription (Appendix 2) presents the coach's instruction over a 1m14sec period as he introduces a drill in mid-practice to a group of players between 14 and 17 years of age on the first day of camp. The bracketed notations of inaudible (i.e. inaudible utterances) depict language that did not allow for certain accuracy in transcription, and as the ultimate potential of this research relies on the naturalness of the recordings and the accuracy of the transcription, these utterances were not transcribed.

For this lesson, the language items for study (i.e., ahh... / kay / [half] a [you]) were selected due to their recurrence in this specific period of instruction, and also because they were identified in the recorded instruction of other coaches observed over the course of the research to date. The basic framework of this lesson plan takes learners through the process of discovering the 'new' language to being able to produce their own combinations of the language in their own sports-based instruction. Learners are systematically introduced to the target language through teacher demonstration, a video recording and transcription, and finally through the chance to produce the language on their own in coaching their classmates. This 90-minute lesson combines a number of activities based on the select text from the video transcript, and presents basic exercises in three parts (i.e. *Introduction, Video and Transcript, Practice & Demonstration*) which have been purposely designed to adapt to a wide range of learner proficiency.

For this particular lesson, students were led through the following activities (see Appendix 1).

Lesson Activities.

Part I. Introduction

- (1) Students were moved between groups using variances of the target language (see Appendix 1, Part I)
- (2) Students were introduced to specific examples of the target language used in (1)
- (3) Students practiced the examples of the target language (e.g., read and repeat)

Part I. Optional Activities

- (4) Pronunciation practice (see Appendix 1, Part I, Optional Activity)

Part II. Video & Transcript

- (5) Students watched the 1m14sec video
(6) Students watched the video with video transcript
(7) Students identified and reviewed target language usage in the transcript

Part III. Practice and Demonstration

- (8) Teacher (as ‘coach’) modeled (variances of) target language usage to demonstrate the final activity (see Appendix 1, Part III, Optional Activity 1)
(9) Members of each group took turns as the ‘coach’, and guided their group members around the class using mainly the target language or variances thereof

Results

In line with the observed success of the learners over the course of the class, this particular lesson appeared to confirm the premise that students would demonstrate increased motivation, attentiveness, and natural language production through language learning activities based on authentic materials. In general, the introduction of sports-specific content appeared to draw students to both the content and the context (i.e. coach-player communication) of the learning. The video recording also appeared to be effective as an initial stimulus to harness learner attention for the activities which followed. Based on observations of students throughout the class, the materials appeared to contribute to the following.

- 1) Language learner motivation: Students displayed a high level of attentiveness in viewing the video recording and in manipulating and applying (variations of) the target language (i.e., ahh... / kay / [half] a [you]) in Part III of the lesson.
- 2) Variable degrees and focus of learning for different (level) learners: The production phase of the lesson (Part III) illustrated a variance in the language which students selected and applied, with some limiting their focus to specific examples and usage of the target language, and others challenging a greater variety of both.
- 3) Accessible language for both lower- and higher-level learners: All learners (i.e. coaches) were able to utilize the target language to successfully complete Part III of the lesson.
- 4) Authentic and flexible use of the target language: Both lower- and higher-level learners were able to produce comprehensible examples of the target language, and, for some students, original variations of that language.

- 5) The transfer of prior learning (linguistic and sport-based): Learners in general were observed to include language items in addition to the target language in their instruction, and instructional methods included characteristics other than those featured in the lesson.
- 6) Greater language production for higher-level learners: Higher-level learners in general were observed to include more content and language variations in their instruction.

The focus on specific items of the target language also appeared to focus the students as well; something that may also have contributed to their effective use of authentic and flexible patterns in Part III of the lesson. The students' ability to successfully complete this part of the lesson showed that the practical application of the target language was well within their capabilities; an important consideration for language classes featuring a range of learner proficiencies.

Several learners in this part of the lesson also included a variety of additional language items in their instruction as well (Table 2), as evident in [Appendix 4](#), a video sample depicting students in the Demonstration part of the lesson. .

Table 2 Examples of added learner language

Examples of added language	
Hey	All, back.
Nice.	Go (over there)
Oh.	Go (over here)
You, here.	Come back. / Come here.
Back, back. All, all.	Move!

In adding this language, whether deliberate or inadvertent, students appeared to access and apply familiar language suitable to the situation (vs. reproducing the examples given) and, in some cases, recognize instances in their instruction that additional language seemed necessary for greater fluency, expression, or, possibly, naturalness. However, this supplemental language also included Japanese utterances as well. Almost all students observed in Part III of the lesson included instances of Japanese language usage independent of and mixed in with their target language instruction, particularly prior to start of coaching and in changing from one coach to the next. Although most of this language comprised incidental communication and fillers such as [ええ～、えっと; directly translated as Ahh.. and/or Umm..], the language

use was clearly evident.

The students' instruction in Part III of the lesson also demonstrated varying degrees of transfer in sports-based experience and language as well. During the activity, several students exhibited language tone and use rather indicative of this type of instruction (directive speech acts), when compared to their regular communicative tone in class. Considering the brevity of the video in Part II and the unassuming presentation of this particular segment of the coach's instruction, it appears that students tapped their own prior experiences to help them perform the activity. This is an important result as it illustrates a lesson that facilitates individual competency and proficiency; learners were able to not only recognize the versatility of the target language (as opposed to viewing it to be more case specific in nature), but were also able to fashion it for their own communicative intentions.

Discussion

The favorable results of the final production part of the lesson were to a great extent anticipated due to the orientation of the content (i.e. sports) and the focus on authentic materials for authentic production. As the materials are a product of the naturalistic observational research of sports camps, it was assumed that learners majoring in sport would be better able to visualize the applicability of the sporting context and therefore generate a connection with the material. Moreover, the lesson provided an authentic opportunity for learners to bridge understanding with unrehearsed production. And, as Johnson (1979, in Stern, 1983) asserts, for second language acquisition, learners need these kinds of opportunities "to engage in extended discourse on real topics, using real language and, most importantly, in real time." Widdowson (1990) also explains in his discussion on the differences between the medium (syntactic) and the mediation (communicative) views of language teaching that such communicative activities can enable learners to take a more positive role in learning as they are able to draw from their own experiences in their mother tongue to achieve meaning.

The lesson also remained focused from start to finish on the purposely selected target language. While the activities included drills and pattern practice characteristic of the Audiolingual method (i.e. repetition, rephrasing), they first and foremost reflected goals conducive to communicative proficiency and language acquisition based on, as Yule (1993) reported, the value of using relevant and authentic language for communication (noted earlier in the list of shared characteristics of Task-based learning and Communicative Language Teaching). In doing so, although students veered in the final production phase of the lesson from the specific target language examples presented and practiced, the context of the activity appeared to hold them to the communicative

objective of meaningful language production.

However, while the lesson proved successful in the selection of content and context for English language production and application, there were also evident areas in need of attention. With the fundamental focus of the lesson was on all-English production in the final instructional phase (Part III), the lesson focused primarily on specific examples of instructional language applicable to guiding group members around, and did not provide examples of bridging language (i.e. the language that precedes and follows the main body of the lesson (coaching)) for students to use prior to and following their instruction. While this was not the primary focus of the class, it was evident through observation and an analysis of the recordings that learner knowledge of this language would have assisted students in maintaining the entirety of the instruction in English and not merely the coaching instructions themselves. Accordingly, in order to modify the contents of this lesson for learning more suitable for application on an international stage in which the instructional process is conducted entirely in English, applicable bridging language must also be adapted for study.

In the same respect, another consideration of note is that this lesson was taught in a class composed entirely of Japanese students. The characteristics of Japanese-English, or the linguistic nuances commonly shared by Japanese people when they speak English (e.g., (katakana) pronunciation, and common usage and grammatical errors) often work to facilitate understanding with their fellow native speakers. As previously mentioned, fillers were also quite widespread in student language production, and, although learners appeared to be essentially unaware of this language use, these seemingly unimportant language items can have a great impact on communication with people who are unfamiliar with them.

Consequently, the activity in Part III should be retried with native English speakers who are (largely) unfamiliar with Japanese-English nuances and culture acting as the 'players.' These interactions need to be carefully observed and evaluated in order to better measure the validity of the results and to confirm the authenticity of the students' language use. In including native speakers in the activity, the Japanese 'coaches' would be forced to rely on their true communicative English ability and not on any shared and culturally-based linguistic understandings. Moreover, as patterns of sports instruction often feature cultural undertones, in cases where Japanese students are instructing each other, even if the language is not entirely understood, the direction of the activity may be. With the participation of native speakers, the students should gain a better understanding of their communicative English language proficiency, and the materials can also be gauged for their true validity. In this more accurate representation of the target language in use, the Japanese students' communicative

proficiency could also be better understood and carefully monitored and evaluated in order to identify any examples of (un)successful language use for future reference and study. This additional focus can also help with repetitive language use and the reinforcement of various successful language patterns through the provision of added opportunities to become more accustomed to the language in practice.

The activities therefore need to be retried with a number of other classes in order to confirm the reliability of the results. Until further trials and subsequent evaluations of the materials can be conducted, the specific reasons behind the aforementioned observed success and/or shortcomings of this particular lesson remain largely speculative. While the positive results, for example, may be attributed to the practical focus of the lesson in terms of the authentic and meaningful communicative activities, these results might simply be the product of learner interest in the topic and/or the cooperative nature of this particular group of learners. And, without re-trial, the consistency with which students do (can) or do not (cannot) individually display such competencies as impromptu or original utterances or language (tone) characteristic of instruction is impossible to measure with accuracy.

From 2010 to date, research data for this study has been collected and analyzed from the naturalistic observations of 8 coaches of 4 different age groups from 5 ice hockey conditioning and skills development camps in Canada. For a more comprehensive sample of language used commonly in sport, both sport and region must be expanded for this study to provide greater value. In order to create sports English language materials which contribute more applicably to those interested in international sport and physical education in general, additional observations and recordings of various coaches and players, and the multitude of sports settings in which they use language, must be conducted. The results would contribute to the creation of a wider array of activities that would allow learners to acquire communicative proficiency in the authentic and widespread language being used in sport today.

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