Designing a Curriculum Based on Communicative Language Learning Approach

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コミュニケーション中心のアプローチに基づく英語カリキュラム編成

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概　　要

　昨今、日本の英語教育はコミュニケーションを重視する傾向にある。確かにそれは重要で、あるべき方向に進んでいると言える。ただ、コミュニケーション中心の授業を行う際に、現場の英語教師がその目標達成のために具体的な指導方法に関してどれだけ精通しているかは不確かである。この論文は、現場に携る者がおのおのの現場で自らオリジナルのカリキュラムを作成する場合の指針となるようにと書かれたものである。大学や短大、語学学校、高等学校などあらゆる教育機関で英語科目のカリキュラムを考える場合に考慮すべきことは多々あるが、特にコミュニケーション中心のカリキュラムの構築に際して不可欠だと考えられる3つの要素がある。それらの要素は、1）ニーズ分析、2）コンテンツ中心のシラバス及びタスク中心のシラバスを融合させた多元的シラバス、そして3）学習と指導の両側面の効果を高める評価機能である。これらの要素はお互いに連携、補完し合ってカリキュラムを機能させている。

Keywords : 　Second Language Acquisition, English Education, Curriculum and Syllabus Design
キーワード：第二言語習得理論、英語教育、カリキュラムとシラバス

　　I have learned a number of important factors that compose successful second language learning and teaching, one of which is that language should be learned through communication. Language, which is bestowed on humankind, is the prime medium of communication. I concur with Wesche (1983) that "second languages are most efficiently acquired through use in meaningful, naturalistic situations" (p.42). It is natural that people learn a language through communication. Therefore, I believe that communication-oriented language teaching can have a significant effect on language learning.

　　This communication-oriented teaching approach is generally known as "communicative language teaching (CLT)." CLT approach is the basis of my philosophy of language learning and teaching. Therefore, I base curriculum design and implementation on CLT approach. In designing the curriculum of a language course, I believe that a curriculum designer should keep in mind

the three following factors : needs analysis, multi-dimensional syllabi including content-based instruction (CBI) and task-based instruction, and assessment that facilitate learning and teaching.

First, it is essential for a teacher and curriculum designer to conduct needs analysis in order to know learners' needs, wants, background, goals, the reasons for studying English, levels of language competence, interests, and so forth. Graves (2000) states that "needs assessment is a systematic and ongoing process of gathering information about students' needs and preferences, interpreting the information, and then making course decisions based on the interpretation in order to meet the needs" (p.98). Each language class has its own unique needs. There is no exactly same school or course anywhere in the world. One curriculum that functioned well in one particular school or course doesn't necessarily result in the same success in another. The curriculum should be shaped in accordance with the learners' needs. Needs analysis is a process used "to design a particular curriculum for a particular target population and language programme" (Shaw, 2003a, p.1).

To take an example of needs analysis, my colleague and I were involved in curriculum design for a hypothetical intermediate ESL course in California, USA. The theme of the course was "diversity." We decided to conduct needs analysis to people and informational sources concerned with language education as well as diversity such as ESL teachers and students, social science experts, the mass media, Internet, local citizens, government, library, and international students. Based on valuable information collected through the needs assessment, we came up with nine topics as follows : food, religion, gender, biodiversity, history, art, Internet, and culture. By designing units according to the nine topics, we successfully completed the curriculum of the course. In this process, needs assessment played an essential role.

Another reason for conducting needs analysis is to formulate goals or objectives. Brown (1995) defines goals as "what the students should be able to do when they leave the program" (p. 71). Graves (2000) refers to goals as "statements about how the goals will be achieved" (p.76). Furthermore, goals should have three domains that should be addressed as follows : cognitive, performance, and affective (Shaw, 2003b).

Without goals, a teacher would feel at a loss, not knowing what, how, why to teach, where to head the class for, and what to assess. Goals or objectives are "the benchmarks of success for a course" (Graves, 2000, p.75). They are necessary elements for the curriculum of a course. Importantly, they should not be isolated from learners' needs. If they don't match each other, learners can easily lose their motivation to study hard and consequently successful outcomes would

not be expected. Goals of a course must be related to the learners' needs and future goals. In order to formulate appropriate goals, therefore, a curriculum developer must be familiar with the learners' needs.

Graves (2000) regards needs analysis as "a dialogue between people : between the teacher and administrators, parents, other teachers ; between the teacher and learners ; among the learners" (p.98). Consequently, this process facilitates learner-centered instruction. Learners' needs and goals are seen as a primary concern in lessons. This helps learners have a sense of ownership (Brown, 2001). Moreover, if the course contains interesting and relevant topics for learners, they will have intrinsic motivation, which is one of the strongest predictors of successful SLA (Skehan, 1989).

Secondly, in addition to needs analysis, content-based instruction (CBI) plays a significant role in second language classroom. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) state that CBI is "the concurrent study of language and subject matter, with the form and sequence of language presentation dictated by content material" (p.7). CBI provides learners with plenty of information of interest and relevance to learners. Thus, learners receive a great deal of input, which is indispensable for second language acquisition (SLA) (Krashen, 1985). Moreover, by introducing a number of pair work and group work, CBI can provide opportunities for learners to participate in interaction in which learners produce language (Long, 1996 ; Kumaravadivelu, 1994 ; Swain, 1995). Furthermore, interaction enables learners to exercise their potential known as Zone of Proximate Development (ZPD) (Vigotsky, 1978). In other words, CBI can engage learners in communication in a meaningful context. Through CBI, learners can focus on not only linguistic elements that arise in lessons but also meaning, which represents the learning style of "focus on form" (Long, 1996).

Take, for example, the French immersion programs in Canada. The students there study many subjects such as Math, history, and chemistry in their second language French. For another example, An International Policy Studies program at a graduate school in America offers content-based foreign language courses through which students directly address relevant subject matters in a second language.

The key factor of CBI, however, is the contents of a course. If the contents are not relevant and interesting to learners, CBI doesn't function as is expected. My colleague Yumiko Miyazaki shared with me her own experience that she couldn't enjoy several classes taught by CBI because she always had to use many kinds of computer software that she was not interested in at all when

she had gone to an English language school. Therefore, she wasn't motivated to learn from such classes (personal communication, May 12, 2003). In her case, there was a discrepancy between her needs and goals and the contents of the class. It was apparent that such discrepancy caused her to lose her motivation.

In selecting topics that will be dealt with in lessons and avoiding such a case as described above, needs analysis plays an important role, again. As mentioned earlier, it gives useful and valuable information regarding learners' needs and goals. Based on the information gathered, topics should be selected that consequently promote intrinsic motivation and a sense of ownership.

Besides CBI, I would like to refer to task-based instruction. According to Skehan (1998), task is an activity in which 1) "meaning is primary; 2) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; 3) task completion has some priority; and 4) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome" (p.95). In addition, Willis (1996) states that a task has an objective that is related to learners' needs.

Legutke and Thomas (1991) presents eight types of communicative learning task: "1) trust-building and relaxation activities; 2) awareness and sensibility training; 3) information-sharing activities; 4) thinking strategies and problem-solving; 5) information-gap, fantasy and creative expression; 6) role-playing and creative dramatics; 7) values clarification and discussion activities; and 8) process evaluation and learner-training" (cited in Shaw, 2003d, p.1).

From a different perspective, Willis (1996) introduces six types of task: 1) listing (brainstorming, fact-findings, etc); 2) ordering and sorting (sequencing, ranking, classifying, categorizing, etc); 3) comparing (matching, relating, finding similarities, differences, etc); 4) problem solving (logic problems, case studies, etc); 5) sharing personal experiences (less goal-oriented and closer to natural conversation); and 6) creative tasks (e.g., projects, often involving research or information gathering and then finding ways to express outcomes (from role plays to PowerPoint)) (cited in Shaw, 2003d, p.1).

In doing a task in pair or group, learners must engage in interactive communication (Long, 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 1994). As mentioned in CBI above, interaction provides the significant environment for learners. Moreover, if tasks are relevant to learners' needs, intrinsic motivation will be promoted and vice versa. It is true that it is difficult to choose what kind of task and how many tasks in lessons. Therefore, needs assessment greatly helps curriculum developer to select tasks appropriate for learners. As far as I am concerned, task-based syllabi can be combined with

content-based syllabi, based on the information obtained by needs assessment. Some syllabi can be shaped by content-based instruction, others by task-based instruction. These two syllabi can collaborately enhance the CLT approach.

To take an example, if you design a task-based syllabus at adult school in America at which many immigrants attend, you can introduce a task in which a learner play a role of doctor and another plays a role of patient. Obviously, this task is strongly related to learners' needs so that the learners are motivated to do the task in earnest.

I worked as an English teacher at public high schools in Japan for about four years. While teaching English to high school students, I had difficulty teaching there because I had to teach them English with which to pass an entrance exam for college, not English in which to communicate with people. English education curricula at high schools in Japan are oriented toward entrance exams for colleges and universities in which broad and accurate knowledge of grammar is mainly focused. Therefore, students who long to enter high-ranked colleges study English only for the purpose of passing exams, whereas those who don't intend to go on studying at college easily tend to lose their motivation to study English. I was not able to enjoy conducting grammar-translation-based lessons. Many of students didn't find them interesting, either. I wished to change such inert English lessons into those in which students can learn how to communicate with English speakers by speaking and listening to English, but I only found that I, first of all, had to alter the curriculum at high school. To do so, however, I have noticed that it is impossible to change the curriculum alone without changing entrance exams for colleges. As a consequence, I have held a vision to alter entrance exams for colleges in Japan somehow or other.

There is the importance of the four traditional criteria by which a language test is evaluated : validity, reliability, practicality, and washback (Bailey, 1998). When I heard the word "washback" for the first time, it was a totally unfamiliar word to me at that time. However, I now believe that one of the most necessary factors for entrance exams in Japan is positive washback. Washback is known as "the effect a test has on teaching and learning" (Bailey, 1998, p.3). Entrance exams in Japan are one cause that is responsible for the current state in which high school graduates cannot communicate with English speakers regardless of receiving a great number of English lessons, which is negative washback to the students (Buck, 1988). What is lacking in Japanese entrance exams is definitely positive washback, which is "a primary goal for test developers" (Bailey, 1996, p.261). Language assessment and learning are not disparate matters. Rather, the

former has great potential to promote the latter. What if Japanese high school graduates are better able to communicate in English as the result of passing entrance exams? That is great positive washback I, as a language teacher, long to see.

Another important factor necessary for English education in Japan is communication-oriented language teaching and testing. People learn a second/foreign language not because they want to know how the structures function, but because they want to engage in communication with others. Language is a medium of communication. It is natural that people learn a language through communication. I concur with Wesche (1983) in that "second languages are most efficiently acquired through use in meaningful, naturalistic situations" (p.42). Thus, communication-oriented language teaching can have a significant effect on language learning. Moreover, I believe that teaching and testing drive each other. Therefore, in order to enhance such communicative language pedagogy, language assessment should measure how students will be able to communicate in the target language in a real situation by making tests reflective of students' real lives (Wesche, 1983).

Authenticity is a key element in communication-oriented language testing. As mentioned above, a test should be related with real life. This is because making a test authentic promotes positive washback to the students to large extent. For example, I frequently faced authentic tasks while taking a graduate seminar on "Second Language Acquisition" in a Master's program. As a matter of course, those tasks didn't have to do with a language test at all. However, those tasks strongly promoted my motivation because they matched my goals rightly. In other words, if the content of a test, whether a language test or not, is relevant to students, the test promotes positive washback. In this respect, an authentic task is likely to be the best candidate for a test item.

In order to create such a communication-oriented language test, we, as test developers as well as teaching professionals, should keep in mind the four principles of communicative language testing: start from somewhere, concentrate on content, bias for best, and work for washback (Swain, 1984). In developing a test, we first must have a theoretical framework to start from. This is because it is important to ensure what we are going to measure. Second, the content of tasks and topics in the test should be appropriate for test takers in terms of age, background, competence level, goals and so forth. Third, test developers should try to elicit best performance from test takers, e.g., by giving examples, making directions clear, etc. Fourth, as mentioned above, we should make our tests conducive to language learning and teaching alike.

Through my test development experience, I have realized the importance of test specifications (Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995). During the creation of my original tests, I looked back to our test specifications over and again. This is how I oriented myself to the right directions. It seems, before designing a test, that a test developer first should make test specifications of a test. Making test specifications overlaps with considering four principles of communicative language testing noted above. However, the both play reciprocal roles in developing a test. In addition, in developing a test, Wesche's (1983) four components will help us construct each test item as follows : stimulus material, task posed to the learner, learner's response, and scoring criteria.

Though I have thus far focused on a conventional language test, especially the entrance exams for colleges in Japan, I am also interested in alternative assessment such as portfolio, self-assessment, and trade-fair. As far as I am concerned, among them portfolio is the most intriguing alternative of a conventional test. Through creating a portfolio by myself and reviewing peers' portfolio when I was in a Master's program, I have realized that portfolio has great potential to represent a student's performance more broadly and deeply than a conventional test. I would like to learn such alternative assessments further in pursuit of better language assessment.

As I have already stated, the three factors 1) needs analysis, 2) multi-dimensional syllabi combining content-based instruction and task-based instruction, and 3) assessment that facilitates learning and teaching alike play significant roles in designing and implementing a curriculum based on communicative language teaching approach. The three factors are related to each other and collaboratively facilitate a curriculum. In this paper, I have held my current position on curriculum design and implementation. However, my understanding is still growing as new research takes place. I would like to be flexible in adopting new ideas as a teaching professional and curriculum designer.

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