《論　文》

Communication strategies and one-on-one teacher-student conversation tests to raise confidence among lower-level English learners

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Abstract

Student lack of motivation and apathy toward classroom activities are pervasive problems at Japanese universities. Teachers at these institutions are being increasingly challenged to find new ways to assess and improve motivation and to engage students' interest. This can be a formidable task for English instructors whose job it is to teach mandatory, communication-oriented classes to students who, for a variety of reasons — low ability, low confidence and overall low interest — are very reluctant to participate in speaking activities in class. Some research on student demotivation points to students feeling overwhelmed and helpless in a traditionally lecture-dominated, passive learning environment.

One solution to remotivate these students is to shift the classroom dynamic toward "active learning" by empowering students with communication strategies — specifically, the skills to actively interrupt and ask the interlocutor (in most cases, the teacher) when they don't understand. This short paper outlines a classroom application of an abbreviated set of communication strategies, as well as an implementation of one-on-one speaking tests to assess those strategies, in General English classes at Sapporo Gakuin University over several semesters beginning Spring 2008. I will discuss what I have done and why, as well as suggest avenues for further research.

Keywords: communication strategies, conversation tests, control, one on one, teacher-student, confidence

1．Background

Student apathy is an aggravating and persistent issue for university teachers in Japan. With regard to learners of English, copious research has been devoted to understanding and dealing with the chronic problem of students who demonstrate an overt disinterest in the classes they are supposedly paying large sums of money to attend (see for example Burden, 2002; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; McVeigh, 2001; Warrington, 2006; Gilbert, 2000; Shimahara, 1984). With specific regard to Sapporo Gakuin University (hereinafter, SGU), several recent Humanities Journal publications document low-motivation classes. Most recently, Grose *et al.* (2009) state:

> The lower level classes are characterized by very poor levels of motivation, sporadic attendance and, despite six or seven years of compulsory English language education at junior high and high school, an astonishing lack of knowledge, working or otherwise, of vocabulary, structures or functions of English. (p.205)

Two documented efforts to improve motivation in English classes at SGU — notwithstanding a great many more undocumented ones — included employing technology such as wireless notebooks (Kay *et al.,* 2007) as well as mobile phones (Hinkelman *et al.,* 2008). These efforts were based in part on the results of a study on Japanese university students by Widdows & Voller (1991) that revealed "a strong degree of student dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods" (cited in Kay *et al.,* 2007, p.49), as well as a study of Japanese university freshmen by Long (1997) which indicated students were interested in video and movie clips "as a means of learning more colloquial expressions" (p.6, cited in Kay *et al.,* 2007, p.49). At the same time, however, Kay *et al.* (2007) observe that Long's (1997) subjects "also wanted English conversational activities that contained elements of authenticity and real purpose" (Kay *et al.,* 2007, p.50). If we can assume that SGU students' opinions and desires are similar to students observed by Widdows & Voller (1991) and Long (1997), then the approaches of Kay *et al.* (2007) and Hinkelman *et al.* (2008) seek to answer students' call for fun, non-traditional English learning through innovative use of technology. My approach, on the other hand, has involved a shift in focus from learning English to learning how to learn English.

2．Communication strategies in SGU General English classes

I was fortunate, just prior to beginning full-time work at SGU in spring 2008, to attend a presentation on communication strategies by Don Maybin, who currently teaches at Shonan Institute of Technology. The substance of this presentation is neatly summarized in a short, 10-page paper by Maybin & Bergschneider (1992) titled "Control: An Independent Learning Model." The primary appeal of his presentation was the idea that communication strategies can be used by anyone, at any time, in any situation, with any language, and that in reality all of us already use communication strategies in our own native language. Maybin & Bergschneider (1992) define the concept of "Control" as a language learner's ability to manipulate or "control" a conversation (p.151) by using receptive learning strategies — principally, by interrupting the speech of an interlocutor and asking for slower delivery, repetition, or clarification of an unknown word or phrase. By employing only a few of these strategies, learners can become actively and successfully engaged in a conversation with *any* speaker, regardless of language ability.

When I began teaching General English classes — four semesters required of all students in all majors at SGU in order to graduate — in spring of 2008, I hit the proverbial wall of student apathy that my colleagues and predecessors had forewarned me of. Several of my 10 classes were considerably more difficult to teach than the others. These difficult classes were marked by blatant disinterest, on the part of more than just one or two students in each class, in the tasks that I had prepared. Most of these tasks were derived from a standard fare of vocabulary and structure-based activities, such as information gaps, that appear in popular English textbooks. Halfway through spring semester 2008, I decided to attempt several activities described in detail on pages 152-154 of the Maybin & Bergschneider (1992) article mentioned earlier. Hereinafter, I will refer to activities based on the ones described in this article as Control Activities.

As a beginning, I briefly introduced the concept of communication strategies, and focused primarily on a set of three key phrases, derived from the first two phases of the "Control Model" set forth in Maybin & Bergschneider (1992, p.151):

1. asking for change in delivery speed (e.g. "More slowly, please.")
2. asking for repetition (e.g. "Say again, please?")
3. asking for clarification / explanation of an unknown word/phrase
   (e.g. "What's _____ ?" See Maybin & Bergschneider, 1992, p.151).

Control Activities, which practiced phrases like the three basic ones listed above (hereinafter, Control Phrases), seemed invariably popular in all classes, even the so-called difficult-to-teach classes. I therefore repeated these activities in each class over a span of six or seven weeks, adding improvisations and weaving the Control Phrases into a variety of other activities.

There are several possible reasons — although I admit they are speculations — that Control Activities seemed so well received among students with such a wide spectrum of abilities and motivations. One reason may be, simply, the newness of the activity. Communication strategies are certainly not new to the English classroom in Japanese universities; many popular textbooks incorporate them at least peripherally. It can be assumed, too, that teachers encourage the use of these kinds of strategies by students during classroom activities. However, it can also be assumed that most teachers do not focus their classroom activities around communication strategies explicitly, methodically, or in the case of what I have been doing, exclusively. Considering the written, discrete-point-based, test-oriented nature of English language learning at the Japanese pre-tertiary level (see for example O'Donnell, 2005; Gorsuch, 1998; Jannuzi, 1994; Hino, 1988), it seems likely that SGU students have never in their English learning careers encountered Control Activities before.

A second reason may be that Control Activities involve "interrupting the interlocutor," who in

the case of classroom training is the English teacher. Again considering the nature of the traditional Japanese classroom environment, which often takes the form of teacher-dominated lectures, it seems likely that few of my students, if any, have ever been encouraged to interrupt a teacher in order to clarify a misunderstanding on their part. The goals of Control Activities — particularly the first two phases of the Control Model mentioned above — are to 1) gain the confidence to interrupt the interlocutor (teacher) and 2) learn how to clarify meaning after interrupting. It may be fun for students to be encouraged to behave toward the teacher in a way that might, in a traditional lecture setting, otherwise be frowned upon.

A possible third reason for the general popularity of Control Activities across all my classes may come from an awareness that the skills gained through the activities can be used by learners of *any* linguistic ability — even by students who regard themselves as having low ability with English. By focusing on strategy competence rather than linguistic competence, the odds are evened for students who have not fared well in traditional language learning environments where ability is measured in terms of memorizing vocabulary and mastering language structures. Suddenly, students with even the most rudimentary command of vocabulary and syntax are empowered with the realization that, by using strategies they already use in their first language, they can adjust or "control" the speech of a conversation to their own level of understanding, and can therefore successfully engage in a meaningful conversation just the same — although maybe not as fluidly — as their more proficient or linguistically apt peers.

Because the focus of my classes in early 2008 had begun to shift significantly toward reviewing Control Phrases, I needed a way to expand the Control Activities in which they were practiced as well as a method to test students on how well they were able to actively use the Control Phrases. The next section illustrates how I have developed the classroom contexts and assessment methods for Control Phrases since early 2008.

3．Testing communication strategies with one-on-one conversation tests

One-on-one teacher-student conversation tests seemed an appropriate assessment venue for several reasons. First, Control Activities are often (but not exclusively) teacher-centered, and they focus on training learners to deal with a conversation in which one speaker of the target language is more proficient than the other. Second, because students in any given class vary in ability and motivation, I wished to avoid the artificiality of testing students on their ability to speak English with their Japanese peers — an act that they would likely never need to do outside of the classroom. I preferred instead to offer the simultaneous experience of speaking with

and being evaluated by a native speaker. Third, I chose one-on-one teacher-student tests because I had experience with them in the past. Prior to teaching at SGU, I worked as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) at three middle schools in a nearby rural town. I was responsible both for designing and conducting one-on-one speaking tests for several grade levels at these three middle schools, as well as for practicing with students who were preparing to take the interview portion of the STEP ("Eiken") test.

Designing and implementing a speaking test for my students at SGU, however, faced two key obstacles. The first obstacle was the time needed to conduct the tests. As an ALT, I recall routinely struggling at one school to fit a class of about 13 students into a 50-minute class time frame. Some testees simply took longer to answer questions than others, although they were able to provide appropriate responses. At a larger school, classes of just over 30 students had to be tested over two consecutive 50-minute English class periods. Invariably, some students had to be accommodated outside these classroom times. At each school, the Japanese teacher of English stayed in the classroom with the students as they completed written worksheets (review material unrelated to the speaking tests), while I conducted the speaking tests in an adjacent empty room. The scripts for these speaking tests were originally a set of unrelated, out-of-context questions which solicited certain grammar-based structures that the students were currently studying. A first year script, for example, read as follows [**target answers in bold**]:

1. What is your name? [**My name is** _____ .]
2. Are you a student? [**Yes, I am.**]
3. [pick up a pen and show] Is this a pen? [**Yes, it is.**]
4. What is your favorite sport? [**I like** _____ .]
5. What do you do in your free time? [**I play /do** _____ **.**]

However, in order to more closely mirror the flow of an actual conversation, with the Japanese teachers' permission I expanded the scripts to accommodate varying student responses. An example mid-year script for 2nd year middle school was as follows [possible student answers in brackets, **target structures in bold**] :

T: Hi _____ , how are you?

S: [**I'm** fine, excellent, OK, etc.]

T: Me too. I'm kind of sleepy, though. **Are you** sleepy?

S: [**Yes I am. / No, I'm not.**] [Yes. / No.]

T: Oh really? **What time** do you usually get up in the morning?

S: [I **usually get up at 7:00.**] [At 7:00] [Seven.]

T: I see. Wow, that's early. I don't like morning. So, **what time did you go to bed** last night?

S: [I **went to bed at** 10:00.] [About 10:00.] [Ten.]

T: Ah. I **went to bed** at 12:00! Well, anyway. . . It's **going to be** summer soon. Getting warm outside. [gesturing to window, fanning face] **What's** your **favorite season**? [if student indicates not understanding, may give hint like "Season. You know, spring, summer, fall . . ."].

S: [**I like** spring/summer/fall/winter/them all (**the best**).]

T: Really? Tell me **why**.

S: [**Because I can** _____ / I like to _____ .]

The second obstacle to designing a test for my SGU students was selecting an appropriate format for the tests. In the formats illustrated immediately above, the goal was to elicit certain language structures or vocabulary. When testing for communication strategy use, however, the goal is to get students to appropriately employ Control Phrases to clarify language structures or vocabulary they do not understand. In order to maximize the opportunities for students to use Control Phrases, as well as to mimic the unrehearsed nature of a real conversation, I used a semi-scripted format that did not seek particular language structures (three example transcripts of conversation tests are provided in Appendix B). Following is a brief account of how I developed and executed these conversation tests over three semesters.

4. Pilot conversation tests, spring 2008

The first round of conversation tests I conducted during the last two weeks (Week 13 and Week 14) of spring semester 2008 were, largely, an impromptu experiment. I told students during Week 11 and Week 12 that Week 13 would be a one-on-one teacher-student oral test week, that the contents would be unrehearsed, and that the goal would be to see how well they could navigate a short conversation using only English and Control Phrases as necessary. My objective was to mimic a "real" native-speaker/nonnative-speaker conversation scenario as closely as possible by, for example, speaking at natural speed and deliberately using contractions, jargon and unfamiliar vocabulary — unless otherwise directed by the student.

4.1 Testing method

Initially I had intended to conduct the tests immediately outside the classroom in the hallway. However, hallway traffic proved distracting, particularly near the beginning and end of class periods. Instead, I used an adjacent empty classroom. I allowed students to freely choose the order in which they came to take the conversation tests, and in the meantime they were free to work on other homework or, if they had been absent from class, they were told to complete the

work they had missed. I marked students using a rudimentary evaluation slip illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Spring 2008 Conversation Test evaluation slip

Name	**response time**	**content**	**use of "Control"**
Comments			

Students were marked holistically with a double-circle ◎, circle ○ or triangle △ according to three categories: response time, content, and (appropriate and frequent) use of Control (phrases).

4.2 Results and considerations

Generally, I was amazed at the level of participation and effort by students. When I was conducting speaking tests as an ALT, I encountered a number of students who would become overwhelmed by the conversation, even with hints and rephrasing, and would give up (Maybin & Bergschneider, 1992 p.149-150, refer to this as "abandoning the conversation") with a staid, helpless expression, responding only with "*wakarimasen.*" Among hundreds of SGU students I have interviewed in conversation tests, only a handful have genuinely frozen up, and even so they partially recovered by being reminded that the goal was to use Control Phrases.

Initially, I had planned to allot three minutes for each student, considering that an average of 24 students per class divided by 90 minutes allows three minutes 45 seconds per student. To accommodate an inevitable number of absentees, especially in low-motivation classes with porous attendance, as well as to allow for students who take longer to speak than others, I had set aside both the 13th and 14th week of classes with the intent of executing most of the tests in the first week and a small remainder in the second week. In actuality, average speaking time took much longer than I expected. I realized that, for each student, I needed more conversation time than three minutes to elicit Control Phrases sufficiently. I also discovered that not having an ordered list of testees established in advance contributed to confusion among students and lengthened the delay between tests.

Following is an outline of other issues I encountered while executing this pilot round of conversation tests.

- Students seemed unilaterally welcoming of "down time" while waiting to be tested. I attached the condition that failing to appear for the test would result in failing the course. I also created an online quiz, but the concern persisted that students were not

given enough work to do to validate the consumption of class time for the purpose of several minutes of direct contact per student.

- Test language (what I asked students) was unscripted in principle, however I found myself following very similar patterns of questions for most students.
- Marking was very vague. I used only symbols, and then only holistically incorporated these marks into the final grade. During each test, I marked two slips at once: one to give to the student, the other for me to keep for grading purposes.
- I had intended to use the "comments" line (see Figure 1 above) to record fragments of speech, but found it extremely difficult to do so without compromising the feel of a "real" conversation — normally one doesn't take notes on what the other person is saying. Additionally, the act of jotting notes marginally distracted from speaking time, especially considering that I was marking two slips at once.

Despite the teacher-labor-intensiveness of conducting these conversation tests, as well as some overoptimistic assumptions as to how much time they would take, the overall student response to the tests seemed very positive. In addition, I was able to gather detailed information about students, as well as to directly witness, individual student by individual student, the uptake of the Control Activities I had focused on during the semester. Encouraged, I decided to develop and expand the conversation tests for the next semester. An account of those expansions follows below.

5．Expanded Control Activities and conversation tests, fall 2008

For the second (fall) semester of 2008, I realized I needed a way to shift the orientation of activities in my General English classes back toward student-centered ones, as well as to provide more opportunities for students to practice conversation in class. I noticed during the spring 2008 round of conversation tests that even many low-level non-English-major students, when given the leeway to do so, seemed generally willing to use very rudimentary and broken English in order to communicate. In order to capitalize on this willingness, I began to employ "timed conversation" activities, an idea borrowed from my full-time colleague at SGU, Kenlay Friesen. Friesen's "timed conversations" involve students conversing in pairs or in groups, about a given, lightly structured topic, for a set time limit — usually about 3-5 minutes. Students then change partners or groups and repeat the activity. I created a set of handouts which include words and phrases that can be used in these conversations. These handouts also feature lists of possible questions and responses, as well as handy Control Phrases, in order to

provide a safety net for low-ability and low-motivation learners. Students were encouraged not to use the handouts whenever possible, and to use as much English as possible, because the conditions of the conversation tests include not being able to use any printed material, as well as that I pretend not to have any Japanese ability.

In addition, I expanded the Control Activities repertoire by including tasks that focused on using gestures to express unknown words or phrases — especially, to elicit these words or phrases from me, the interlocutor — as well as activities that involved using different words to describe an unknown word or phrase (Dörnyei (1995, p.58) refers to this as "circumlocution"). Finally, I added activities that highlight phrases which show your conversation partner that you are listening. I refer to these phrases by their Japanese term, *aizuchi*.

5.1 Testing method improvements

The method by which I conducted conversation tests in fall of 2008 was similar to spring semester, with several key modifications. Namely, I:

- established at the beginning of the semester that the tests would be conducted, rather than abruptly announcing them a week or two in advance.
- recognized that conducting these one-on-one tests would require two full 90-minute class periods, as well as perhaps some time outside of class.
- established a list, one week in advance of the conversation tests, of which students would take tests during which of two weeks, and in what order. I allowed students who were present on the day one week before the tests to negotiate among themselves and choose the day and order they preferred (this was considerably well received).
- posted this list on the class Website. I also made a large A-3 copy of the list and posted it on the whiteboard in the classroom on test days, along with a reminder to complete the online written test. Posting this list of testees on the whiteboard seemed to help speed the transition of students between speaking tests.
- wrote (in Japanese) and passed out a detailed description of what the tests entailed and posted this description on the class Website. For details, as well as the expanded evaluation form, see *Appendix A: Conversation Test handout, fall 2008*.
- created a "profile" sheet for each student, on which I recorded the final conversation test results. These profile sheets were convenient for collecting notes on individual student performance throughout the semester, for recording conversation test results, and ultimately for determining final grades at semester-end.

5.2 Results and considerations

Fall 2008 conversation tests went more smoothly than the pilot tests in spring 2008. Check-markable key Control Phrases as well as several key "Content" criteria listed on the evaluation slips made marking easier and slightly quantifiable. Devoting two full class periods to testing secured more time for one-on-one speaking (a full 5-6 minutes rather than a rushed 3 minutes), so I eliminated the earlier "response time" criterion. I also gave up on trying to fill in two evaluation forms at once during the tests. I had intended instead to record the scores on the class Website, however I admit that I did not ultimately fulfill this intention.

Increasingly, I began to confront the reality that because my classes were so focused on use of communication strategies that I was compromising teaching and testing the English language itself. With regard to conversation tests, I needed a better way to define the Content criterion and to account for what language students use to participate in the conversations. I therefore added several items to the evaluation form under the Content category, including students' use of *aizuchi* and whether they took the initiative to ask me questions. I also expanded the short quiz into a longer test for students to do while they are waiting. This seemed an appropriate first step to compensate for the time consumed by orally testing students individually.

Finally, as an experiment, I began videotaping my conversation tests. I thought that, should the need arise, I could review the videos for grading purposes, as well as to review my own performance as an interviewer. Ultimately I used the videos for these purposes very sparsely. In fact I learned that even simply attaching filenames to the videos for archiving purposes requires considerable time and effort. However, by experimenting with videotaping I was able to start collecting a considerable library of actual conversations with students. These videos could be plumbed in future (with students' permission) for scenes with exemplary uses of Control Phrases as peer-modeling for future classes. Alternatively, transcripts of these conversations may also be useful in a localized study of student "interlanguage," as it is this concept, according to Dörnyei (1995, p.55), from which the study of communication strategies has sprung.

6．Expanded conversation and written tests, spring 2009

In 2009 SGU added a 15th week of formal classroom instruction to each semester. This better accommodated two rounds of extended one-on-one conversation tests in one semester, which I tentatively labeled a midterm test and a final test. The idea behind conducting two rounds of testing in one semester was to get students used to the format and foster confidence toward one-on-one tests with a native English speaker, as well as to provide an opportunity for students to

improve between one test to another.

6.1 Testing method improvements

The execution of the midterm conversation test was based largely on what I had done at the end of fall semester 2008. However, during spring semester 2009 I eliminated a number of classroom activities that had been somewhat unenthusiastically received in the past — mostly written exercises for which I had little time to provide feedback. I replaced them with speaking activities that practiced a variety of conversational phrases, particularly greetings. I then expanded the second (final) conversation test evaluation forms to include checkboxes for these phrases under the Content category. For a comparison of evaluation forms, see *Appendix C: Spring 2009 student profile and evaluation sheets.*

In addition, I:

- included several new forms of Control checkboxes. Particularly, during the midterm test I noticed many students repeating words and phrases they did not understand. Dörnyei (1995) categorizes this strategy of sound imitation as "use of nonlinguistic means" to indicate non-understanding (p.58). I added a checkbox for this, labeled **発音真似**, *hatsuon-mane,* or "pronunciation imitation."
- reclassified "gestures" under the Control category rather than the Content category. Dörnyei (1995, p.58) refers to gestures and mime as a "nonlinguistic means" strategy as well.
- expanded Control Phrases to include "polite request" forms ("Could you ～ ?"). I also expanded the checkboxes on the second (final) conversation test evaluation forms to account for polite [P], regular [R] and one-word/broken [O] use of Control Phrases.
- noticed that a few students would try to confirm what they heard using a related word (for example "weekend" → "Saturday, Sunday?"). I added a checkbox for this, labeled **意味確認**, *imi-kakunin,* or "meaning-confirm."
- quantified the symbols I had been using: ◎＝50 points, ○＝30 points, △＝10 points. Content and Control scores were added to produce a score out of 100, which could be directly figured into a final grade score (see *Appendix C: Spring 2009 student profile and evaluation sheets*).
- attempted to attach point values to each checkbox item on the second (final) conversation test evaluation form.
- created a written midterm and final test online, doubled in size from the previous semester, compiled from activities, worksheets and online quizzes done in class.

- videotaped all but a handful (due to battery failures and other technical difficulties) of two rounds of conversation tests during the semester.

6.2 Results and considerations

Despite the inevitably labor-intensive nature of these conversation tests, the procedure has become much smoother than when I began a year ago. Student response continues to be generally positive. Possibly because of the considerable leeway given to students to complete the written tests (a span of two weeks), a review of the Website for each class during the final grading period revealed the completion rate to be very good — only a handful of students, even in the lower-motivation classes, failed to complete them at all. Further, the time taken by students to complete these written tests has increased. If devoting classroom "contact hours" to one-on-one conversation tests, as I have been experimenting with, can be at least partially rationalized by providing students with meaningful tasks whose completion requires the same amount of time that they are not engaged in the actual conversation tests, then this particular kind of extended one-on-one conversation test can potentially be sustained in the future. The ongoing development of these tasks, whether they are formally referred to as "tests" or not, is key.

One particularly salient phenomenon I observed during the first (midterm) tests this spring semester was the fact that it was difficult to elicit Control Phrases from a small number of students — not because they were shy, unwilling, or had not sufficiently acquired skill with Control Phrases, but likely because their listening and/or comprehension skills were advanced enough that they could appropriately participate in the conversation without clarifying deliberately high-speed delivery or slangish, abbreviated or colloquial expressions that commonly occur in conversation between native speakers. During the second (final) tests, I paid attention to these cases and documented them, as appears in Figure 3 below. As a result of videotaping and improved evaluation forms, I was able to compile some other pertinent data, set out in Figure 2 and Figure 3. A discussion of several key points follows.

6.3 Discussion of data

The data in Figure 2 and Figure 3 suggest three points that are particularly worthy of consideration. The first point regards students from whom it was difficult to elicit Control Phrases. My class of second-year English majors had a particularly high number of these students, despite their being the "lowest" level class (with a typically concomitant porous attendance as other "low-level" classes) according to the SGU placement test. This high ratio suggests that this 2nd-year class of students may contain a higher number of students with more communica-

Figure 2: Conversation Test #1 (midterm), Spring 2009

Major	**English**		**Law**		**Soc. Info.**	**Bus./ Fin.**	**Commerce**	**Economics**		
Class	**IIB (26)**	**IB (24)**	**IIIB (29)**	**IB (28)**	**IIIB (34)**	**IB (1)**	**IIIB (3)**	**IIIB (11)**	**IB (10)**	**total**
Total takers	28	19	22	24	22	24	19	10	24	192
Time										
Average time per test	8:15	8:19	6:30	6:49	6:22	7:01	7:29	8:11	6:28	7:16
Longest time	13:37	12:51	8:44	8:55	8:51	10:14	10:21	11:01	11:48	10:42
Shortest time	5:27	5:54	4:55	4:41	4:08	4:17	4:57	5:11	4:20	4:52
Scores										
No. takers scoring 100	19	10	14	13	7	16	7	6	17	109
No. takers scoring 80	7	6	5	10	9	7	6	2	5	57
No. takers scoring 60	1	2	2	1	5	1	4	2	2	20
No. takers scoring<60	1	1	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	6

* Actual speaking time. Does not include time between tests.

Figure 3: Conversation Test #2 (final), Spring 2009

Major	**English**		**Law**		**Soc. Info.**	**Bus./ Fin.**	**Commerce**	**Economics**		
Class	**IIB (26)**	**IB (24)**	**IIIB (29)**	**IB (28)**	**IIIB (34)**	**IB (1)**	**IIIB (3)**	**IIIB (11)**	**IB (10)**	**total**
Total takers	27	18	21	24	22	23	19	8	24	186
Time										
Average time per test	10:54	8:33	7:07	7:43	8:06	7:33	9:06	10:27	8:23	8:39
Longest time	16:46	11:14	11:36	13:50	12:24	10:32	14:25	15:07	13:26	13:15
Shortest time	6:00	6:03	4:46	5:58	5:34	4:36	6:28	6:58	4:39	5:40
Scores										
No. takers scoring 100	24	14	14	17	13	23	10	5	20	140
No. takers scoring 80	3	-	4	6	5	-	2	3	3	26
No. takers scoring 60	-	2	3	1	3	-	4	-	-	13
No. takers scoring<60	-	2	-	-	1	-	3	-	1	7
Control Phrase Use										
Didn't need "Control"?	10	3	1	2	3	3	1	-	1	24

* Actual speaking time. Does not include time between tests.

tive competence than their placement in the lowest level class implies. One possible explanation for this may be, as Grose (2008) observes, that some students are not motivated to perform well on the placement tests in order to be placed in a higher level class. The partial script from a conversation test with one of these 2nd Year English major students is provided as Excerpt 3 under *Appendix B: Conversation Test excerpts, spring 2009*.

Second, students overall got higher scores on the second (final) conversation tests, despite that this test was more complex — for example, it included more Content phrases and levels of Control Phrases). This seems to support the idea that students became comfortable with the test format. The fact that students performed better on the second of two similar tests is tentatively encouraging. However, it must be acknowledged that the act of devoting four out of 15 weeks in one semester to testing is experimental. As yet, devoting even two weeks may be considered academically obscure and/or questionable in terms of fulfilling "contact hour" requirements for receiving credits. In any case, the benefits for students as a result of these tests need to be more clearly demonstrated. Maybin & Bergschneider (1992) report that after a certain activity they asked students directly

> ... how they felt when first called upon to stand in front of the class and control the instructor's monologue (probably uncomfortable and nervous). Then, they are asked to describe how they felt after returning to the front several times. Typically they will describe the experience as left painful and their own behaviour as more confident. (p.158)

Dörnyei (1995, p.72) conducted a much more thorough investigation of student attitudes and the perceived usefulness of communication strategy training. In the future, learner confidence and attitudes toward extended one-on-one conversation tests should be similarly systematically surveyed. I have informally heard from a number of students regarding how they felt about taking the one-on-one conversation tests. Some report initial nervousness — especially of talking one-on-one with a native speaker — that pleasantly dissolved into a feeling of accomplishment. However, a more objective and thorough solicitation of students opinions via, for example, a brief questionnaire, would be more telling.

Third, the average time for both conversation tests was over seven minutes. Averages of the absolute shortest times students took for the conversation tests were just under five minutes. It seems unlikely, therefore, that these conversations can be trimmed or abbreviated to fit within a shorter (less than three minute) time frame that would allow them to be conducted within a single 90-minute class period. It should be mentioned, too, that average longer speaking times in the second (final) conversation test are a result of accommodating more students outside of classroom times, by appointment. Given no time limit, many students seem willing to engage in a

conversation for longer than an average seven minutes. Finally, it seems plausible that other forms of Control testing can be developed which do not necessarily involve an entire conversation (a shorter "speaking test" rather than an extended "conversation test"), and would not devour two consecutive class periods. Another possibility may be a semester combination of shorter speaking tests and longer conversation tests.

7. Conclusions

Control Activities are something new, something potentially fun, something that makes students aware of skills which they already use in their first language and which have near-universal applications both in the foreign language classroom and in real-world settings. Dörnyei (1995, p.64) comments that opportunities for practice in strategy use are necessary because they "can only fulfil their function as immediate first aid devices if their use has reached the automatic stage. My experience in L2 teaching and communication strategy training suggests that this automatization will not always occur without specific focused practice (see also Willems, 1987)." In the case of English classes taught by native English speakers at SGU, extended one-on-one teacher-student conversations seem to offer such an opportunity. Notwithstanding their debatable validity, reliability and practicality as a testing device, at very least these one-on-one tests provide the personal experience to each student of having negotiated a focused English conversation with a native speaker. However, it will be helpful in the future to conduct surveys that solicit student opinions on Control Activities and communication strategy training, to analyze the washback effects of one-on-one speaking tests, or both.

The categorization of communication strategies — as well as how, to what degree, or whether at all communication strategies should be explicitly taught — remain debatable issues (Dörnyei, 1995). The value of focusing on them in General English classes at SGU, or in required English classes at universities elsewhere, remains similarly debatable. Certainly, the way I have been concentrating almost exclusively on a limited set of these strategies in my classes, as well as how I have gone about testing students for mastery of these strategies, deserves more rigorous evaluation. Particularly, considering that informed learners are better learners with respect to strategy training (Maybin & Bergschneider, 1992, p.157), and that as Wenden (1986) observes, as a result of informed training "Students use the learned strategy more frequently and more effectively, (p.316) " it will be beneficial not only to train students how to use communication strategies but also to explicitly state — or better yet demonstrate — why these strategies are being taught and how they can be helpful in a variety of situations outside of the classroom. It

may also be helpful to explain how students already know and use these strategies in their first language (Dörnyei, 1995, p.63). Further, I believe that Control Activities need to be expanded and integrated with more activities that involve linguistic content, and that more communication strategies than I have focused on should be introduced and taught. I think there can be little doubt, however, that focused teaching and training of communication strategies in English classrooms at SGU or at other universities in Japan is worthy of increased attention. I am optimistic that such a focus can boost motivation among lower-level students in classes such as those at SGU, who might otherwise be unreceptive to English language learning.

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Appendix A：Conversation Test handout, Fall 2008

第２会話テストについて

前期の第１回のテストとほとんど同じですが、今回あなたが会話のスターターです。
今まで授業中触れた話題（Class, Movies, Sports など）でもいいですが、
それ以外の話題も歓迎します。自分のプロフィールに載ってある情報について
聞かれるかもしれません。

※　会話テスト中、授業で使ったプリントは使用できません。

いつ： 第１３回（月曜日１月１９日）、
第１４回（月曜日１月２６日）。

どこ： 教室以外のところ、一人ひとりで。

目的： ５～６分、英語だけで会話をする。

※　ライアンは日本語を全く分からない振りをする。

会話内容：自由

教室で待っている間、elearning.sgu.ac.jp にアクセスし、必ず “FINAL TEST” を受けてください。

評価用紙は以下のとおりです。　◎（優）○（良）△（可）　を付けます。

Name: *SATSUGAKU Tarou*	**Content**	**“Control”**
第２回会話テスト	◎	○

“Control”の使用	**Content（会話の内容、つながり）**
□□□ More slowly please などの表現	□□□ How about you?
□□□ Say again please などの表現	□□□ ライアンに質問をした
□□□ What’s _____？ などの表現	□□□ あいづちを使った
□□□ 知らない単語の発音を真似した	□□□ ジェスチャーを使った

備考：

Content, “Control”の説明

Content

◎　積極的に英語でコミュニケーションを取ろうとした。
○　英語でコミュニケーションを取ろうと努力した。
△　英語でコミュニケーションをあまり取ろうとしなかった。

“Control”

◎　積極的に“control”表現を使用した。
○　ライアンの話が分からなかった時、“control”を使用する努力をした。
△　ライアンの話が分からなくても“control”の使用をしようと
しなかった。

Appendix B: Conversation Test excerpts, spring 2009

Key 1: T = Teacher, S = Student, [comments in brackets], *Japanese in italics*

Key 2: These codes indicate at what point the marker would tick the appropriate checkbox on the evaluation slip.

RPT = repeat request, ***SLO*** = slower delivery request,

EXP = explanation request, ***GES*** = *gesture*, ***AIZ*** = *aizuchi*

Excerpt 1: Law major, second year

T: So how's school goin' for ya? [deliberately inserting wordy and/or contracted linguistic structures]

S: Pardon? ***RPT***

T: How is school?

S: Say again please? ***SLO***

T: How is . . . your school life?

S: . . . .

T: Good? So-so? Bad?

S: So-so.

T: Really? Why so-so?

S: Ahhh . . . Sleepy.

T: You're sleepy?

S: Uh-huh! [enthusiastically applying casual *aizuchi*] ***AIZ***

T: [chuckles] Me too.

S: Yeah. [smiles]

T: So what time d'ja go da bed last night?

S: Excuse me. *Nnnn-to,* Say again please. ***RPT***

T: Sure. What. . . what time d'jyou, ah, go to bed?

S: *nanji netakke*. . . . What time?

T: Yeah. What time?

S: Go . . . to . . . sleep? [gesturing] ***GES***

T: Right.

S: . . . [counting on fingers] About two. ***GES***

T: Ahh, the wee hours. [smiling, knowing student wouldn't understand.]

S: Wee hou . . .? What's "wee hou. . ." ***EXP***

T: Wee hours? Means like, 1, 2, 3, 4 a.m. Really late.

S: Wee hours. Ah. I see. ***AIZ***

T: Yeah, I'm a night owl too. [said really fast]

S: [smiling, hand in air] Excuse me.

T: Yes??

S: More slowly please. ***SLO***

T: Ah, of course. A "night owl."

S: . . . . [puzzled look] Night ou. . .?

T: Right. A night owl.

S: What's . . .a. . . night . . . ou ? ***EXP***

T: A night owl is a person who stays up late.

[continues]

Excerpt 2: Social information major, second year

T: So d'ya have any kindofa part time job? [deliberately inserting jargon]

S: . . . One more. ***RPT***

T: D'ya have a part time job? [still deliberately fast]

S: What's that? ***EXP***

T: Uhhh, Part-time? You have . . . part time job?

S: What "part time job?" ***EXP***

T: Uhh, well, for example, a gas station, a convenience store. You know, get money? [gesturing money]

S: Ah, [indicating understanding] Yes. I have . . . part time job. It's . . . *konbini.*

T: *Konbini?* What does *konbini* mean?

S: . . . *Nnnn-to,* for example, 7-11, Seicomart. . .

T: Ahh, you mean a convenience store!

S: Yes! Convenience store. I have, part time job convenience store.

T: Really? How many days of the week do you usually work then?

S: . . . One more. ***RPT***

T: How many days a week do you work?

S: One week?

T: Yeah.

S: Days?

T: Right.

S: . . . . Three or four.

T: Really?

S: Yes. This week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, ahhh, Saturday.

T: I see. So you work on weekends then, huh?

S: . . . one more. ***RPT***

T: You work on weekends.

S: What "weekends?" ***EXP***

[continues]

Excerpt 3: English major, second year

T: Anyway, so tell me. . . uhh, well first of all it's good to see you. [deliberately fast]

S: eh?

T: It's good to see you.

S: Oh. You too.

T: Oh thank you, thank you. So tell me, what's new? What's goin' on in your life?

S: Mmmm, ahhnn, ahhh, two years a-go.

T: Yeah.

S: Ago.

T: Yeah. Two years ago. Yeah.

S: Yeah. I. . .I drunk, I drunk with my worker. Uhh, co-worker.

T: Two years ago?

S: Yeah. Uhh, Sunday.

T: Ah, two days ago.

S: Ah ah ah, right. Two days.

T: I thought wow, you have a good memory! Two days ago, yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

S: So, ahhh, she is, a girl who go Otaru Commercial University.

T: Ah, sure sure sure sure.

S: Student, is here, so, she and me talk with English, and . . .

T: You're kidding. Cool! Really. Uh-huh.

S: Yeah, ah, I'm, I'm major is English, she say I, so, she, she, yeah me too! Say. So, oh, let's talking in English!

T: Oh my god, really!

S: Yeah so, it was, and we talk, and that's . . . good. Interesting. Yeah.

T: That's amazing. Do you know how —

S: Amazing, really? ***AIZ***

T: Yes, yes, yes really. Ahhh, because, it's very strange for — not strange, not in a bad way, but — when you have somebody who is Japanese, and speaks Japanese [gesturing], Japanese, and speaks Japanese, deliberately, to use English is very, like, wow!

S: [peppering my monologue, deliberately spoken at natural speed, with "Yeah, yeah."] ***AIZ***

T: It would be like Martin, you know Martin?

S: Yeah.

T: Yeah yeah.

S: I know.

T: He, he knows Japanese, and sometimes when we are talking with somebody who is Japanese, we'll all use Japanese, right?

S: Oh.

T: I'm talking to him in Japanese, and it's just like . . . (laughs)

S: (laughs)

T: So, it's funny because, in the classroom, you know, we a —, when, when we do all the, you know, the three-minute conversations, here's three minutes talk in English, you, you know?

S: Three minutes?

T: Yeah.

S: Uhh, I dunno.

T: Well, do you — you, you remember when we — ah, were you there? When we did the, ahh, three-minute timed conversation, classroom. English class.

S: Oh, yeah.

T: You remember that, you know, where I had my little time thing, [makes thunking noise, gesturing turning over a sandglass] here's three minutes, talk English! Like that.

S: Ohhh, yeah yeah.

T: Yeah. So, it seems very simple, because it's three minutes and you can say anything. But actually it's very difficult, because, it's strange for somebody who is Japanese, and somebody who is Japanese, to talk in English.

S: Ohhh.

T: It's very. . . Now, if for example, if you were, Japanese and talking to somebody, from . . . Vietnam, and they know English —

S: Excuse me — what's Bee-nam? ***EXP***

T: Oh! Oooh, that's beautiful! [referring to use of Control].

S: That is. . .

T: Vietnam. D'ya, d'ya do you know Vietnam? It's a country.

S: Vietnam? Country. Ohhhh.

T: Vietnam. Mm-hmm.

S: Vietnam?

T: Vietnam.

S: Vietnam is, America?

T: No, actually Vietnam is, ahhh —

S: *Be-to-na-mu?*

T: Yesss. [implicitly admitting understanding of Japanese pronunciation.] Exactly. Vietnam. Right.

S: Ahhhhh!! [understands]

T: So for example, if you, and somebody from Vietnam, you don't know Vietnamese, but maybe they know English, so, you can use English to talk or they don't know Japanese, then you can use English to talk but, for somebody who is Japanese, somebody who is Japanese, both know Japanese, to talk in English is . . . very . . . good. (laughs)

S: *Yoshi!*

T: Yeah, it's a very very . . . yeah, very, uhh, interesting.

S: *Heee* . . .

T: Really. So you're talkin' away in English there, you were, ahhh, you were talking to this . . . student? Student at Commercial . . . University?

S: Yeah, student.

T: You know Martin teaches there.

S: No?

T: I think. Doesn't he? Otaru. . .

S: Oh really?

T: I think so yeah. I think he does.

S: Ohh, I dunno.

T: I think he does. He's there part time. Anyway.

S: Mmmm?

T: So whadid'jou talk about? With, with ahhhh . . .

S: Oh, nahh. Ahh.

T: Uh.

S: Mmmm, mmmm, I, I talk of not special.

T: Nothing special, really. Just —

S: Yeah. [gestures] ***GES***

T: Just ahh. . . ahhhm. . . how'dya say. Just, basic conversation stuff.

S: Basic conversation?

T: Yes basic, basic —

S: Basic.

T: Yeah. Basic. Very . . .

S: Basic.

T: Uh-huh.

S: Basic. *Kihon* . . .

T: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah yeah, like that. It'd be very . . . small. . . .

S: Small. [mimicking pronunciation]

T: In English you would say, small talk.

S: Small talk.

T: Uh-huh. Small talk. [writes quickly on paper and shows] Small talk. Just means, very simple conversation. Nothing deep. Y'know. Just, simple.

S: *Heeee*. . .

T: So tell me, was, was . . . did you think that her English was better than yours, or vice versa.

S: What's that vice, vice-versa?

T: Good question! Vice-versa, vice —

S: Vice-versa.

T: Mmm-hmm. Vice, [again quickly writing on paper and showing], versa.
Vice-versa means, or the other way around, or opposite.

S: Oh.

T: Right. For example, did you think that your English is better than her, or —

S: Oh!

T: — her English is better than you, which one.

S: Ahhhh . . .

T: Opposite. Which one did you think.

S: Maybe, I, I think. . .

T: Mm-hm.

S: . . . she know, uhh

T: Mm-hm.

S: Ahh, many . . . words.

T: Words.

S: Many English words,

T: OK. Vocabulary.

S: more, more, than me. But,

T: Mm-hm.

S: My . . . ummm, *hatsuon* —

T: Ahhh, your pronunciation.

S: Pronunciation,

T: Mm-hm.

S: pronunciation —

T: Yes.

S: is better than . . .

T: Hers.

S: Better than her.

T: Ohhh.

S: Yeah. Maybe.

T: Maybe.

S: Yeah.

T: Heeh, interesting!

S: Yeah, so interesting.

T: Heeeh, cool! Mmmm, so, has she ever been overseas, she ever been to a different country or . . .

S: Ahhh, no, I dunno.

T: Mmmm.

S: But, I . . . I went to the Saipan,

T: Oh really! OK.

S: Yeah, when I . . . junior high school student.

T: You were in Saipan in junior high school? Really?

S: Yeah. I . . . my, my hometown,

T: Uh-huh.

S: My hometown,

T: Yeah.

S: uhhh, is. . . pays costs, half of costs,

T: Niigata, right?

S: Yeah. That's right.

T: Yeah yeah yeah.

S: Yeah. So, ahhm . . . mmmm, I am, my . . .

T: Uh-huh.

S: my junior high school students,

T: Right.

S: with, go to the Saipan, and . . . junior high — junior high school students

T: Right.

S: in Saipan school,

T: Mm-hm.

S: Yeah, with. . . had, conversation.

T: Conversation, sure. Sure sure.

S: Conversation. Sure. Or, and, go . . . ahh —

T: Uh.

S: They. . . they, they tell — tell us for, about . . .um, Saipan's country — ahh, culture. And, we talk . . . we. . .we tell, in Japanese culture.

T: Sure sure sure.

S: Yeah.

T: Cultural exchange talk, wow that's amazing.

S: Yeah!

T: Interesting!

S: Yeah, it's interesting.

T: Mmmmm.

S: I'm glad to hear native English speak —

[video cuts off]

Appendix C：Spring 2009 student profile and evaluation sheets（midterm and final）

Name: Satsugaku Tarou
Nickname (if any): Sacchan
Born in（生まれ）: America
Grew up in（育ち）: Japan
Part-time job? (Y / N): Yes
Video game that I like: Donkey Kong
Movie that I like: One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
Music that I like: Bach
Looking forward to summer vacation? (Y / N): Of course
Enjoying SGU life? (Y / N): Love it.
Japanese words that I like: 好きこそものの上手なれ
English words that I like: If you like it, you'll get good at it.

札学　太郎
SATSUGAKU
Tarou
X012345
月1（OO）

第 1 回会話テスト	Content	"Control"
	○	○

"Control"の使用

- ☐☐☐ More slowly please などの表現
- ☐☐☐ Say again please などの表現
- ☐☐☐ What's _____ ? などの表現

Content（会話の内容、つながり）

- ☐☐☐ ライアンに質問をした
- ☐☐☐ あいづちを使った
- ☐☐☐ ジェスチャー

備考：

第 2 回会話テスト	Content	"Control"
	○	◎

CONTROL：(polite [P]= 5pt, regular [R] = 3pt, one-word/*katakoto* [O] = 1pt

☐☐☐ slow　☐☐☐ explain　☐☐☐ repeat

☐ other CONTROL (2pt ea)　☐☐ Gesture (2pt ea)　☐☐ 発音の真似 (2pt ea)

CONTENT：(2pt ea, "tell me about" = 5pt)　☐☐ 意味確認 (2pt ea)

☐ Good to see you!　☐ How are you?　☐ What's new?

☐ Tell me about [your other classes] [your part-time job]

☐ Do you have lots of tests/reports?　☐ Looking forward to summer vacation?

☐ See you later!　☐ Have a _____ _____!

BONUS: ☐ あいづち (uh-huh, I see, oh really, me too.) ☐ asked question w/o prompt. ☐ Kind of / not really ☐ Me neither

Participation (50%)	Midterm + Final (25%)	会話１＋ 会話２ (25%)

基礎レベル英語学習者の自信を養うための
コミュニケーション・ストラテジーと一対一による会話テスト

概　　要

学生のモチベーションの欠如や教室でのアクティビティへの無関心は，日本の大学における問題の一つとして広く認識されている。このような教育機関における教員にとって，学生のモチベーションを改善し，学生の興味を引き付ける新しい方法を見つける必要性がますます高まっている。しかし，さまざまな理由で能力・自信・興味が低く，教室での活動に熱心に取り組まない学生にコミュニケーション英語を教える英語教員にとって，学生の動機づけは困難な課題である。

学生のモチベーション不足に関する研究に，学生がやる気を失う要因として伝統的な講義形式による受動的学習環境を指摘するものがある。さらに，モチベーションを向上させる解決法の一つとして，学生のコミュニケーション方略を強めることで，クラスの力学を積極的な学びの方向へシフトすることが挙げられる。特に，理解できないときは積極的に対話者（多くの場合教員）を中断し質問をするというスキルが重要となる。本論は，2008年春以降，札幌学院大学全学共通英語科目において一対一のスピーキングテストで行ったコミュニケーション能力評価ならびに，教室内でのコミュニケーション方法について概要を述べる。

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