

CHAPTER 3

Keynote Lecture Part 2: Japanese Language Pedagogy

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We all know that the word *Kakehashi* (bridge across) was used by Dr. Inazo Nitobe, referring to his resolve that he would work to bridge the cultures between the West and Japan. At that time, not many people could travel from Japan to the US or Europe, and a person such as Dr. Nitobe who knew both about Japan and Europe was very rare. Therefore, in order for the Japanese to understand the Western culture, and in order for the Westerners to understand Japan, Dr. Nitobe was certainly a very precious person. We are aware that he played a very important role for intercultural and international understanding, and I think that the word *Kakehashi* was very suitable for him to use. Today, because of the globalization of business or tourism, and because of the advancement of technology, different cultures may be more in close contact than before. Thus, from a cultural point of view, Japanese food such as sushi is not necessarily something rare in Canada, or a Japanese sport such as “sumo” seems to be widely known all over the world. In Japan, on the other hand, many Japanese newspapers and magazines are full of loan words which tell us about foreign cultures. Therefore, we can even say that today many of us should be able to play the role of some kind of *Kakehashi*. We certainly want that bridge to be a good one, and in this sense, I consider that the symposium of *Kakehashi* today is very meaningful.

For intercultural understanding, I believe that there are many ways. We can understand other cultures through music, paintings, pictures, dancing, merchandise, political system, etc. However, I believe that language is one of the most important and effective means of understanding another culture. It is through language that we can understand what is going on in the brains of another person, and in much the same way, it is through language that we can understand what is going on in the minds of the people of another culture. In this sense, we may even say that language plays the essential role of *Kakehashi*. Since it plays such an important role, it has to be an excellent bridge, and the architect and carpenter of the bridge must be excellent also so that the bridge will successfully connect between cultures and peoples. In a sense, a language teacher can be compared to an architect or carpenter of *Kakehashi*.

I understand that many of you today are in the field of language teaching, and since I used to be a language teacher myself, so I will spend the rest of my time here to talk about language learning and teaching.

First of all, I must mention that in teaching a foreign language, I believe that we should follow different approaches and methods depending upon grades and levels. Could we say, for example that the introductory level should be taught differently from the advanced level. This is because at the introductory level basic phonological and grammatical structures must be correctly internalized together with a basic writing system, but in the advanced level, the students' knowledge of vocabulary items, expressions, and sentences must be enhanced and strengthened. This basic principle of teaching a foreign language is the same whether you are teaching Japanese in Canada, or English in Japan.

I have spent over forty years of my life in teaching English to Japanese students, and Japanese to students in the US and Canada. As a linguist and a language teacher, I have observed that theories and methodologies of language teaching have often changed during those years. We can ask why there have been so many changes. I can think of various reasons, but I should mention three of them briefly today.

First, I have to mention that foreign language learning is a very slow process, and there has always been a sense of frustration among both the teachers and students. Therefore, they tend to search constantly for some better ways of teaching and learning.

Secondly, there have been changes in linguistic and learning theories on which approaches must be based. For example, during the 1950's, many linguists considered language from the viewpoint of habits. They were called "structural linguists." Then, in the 60's, linguists began to consider language from the viewpoint of rule-governed knowledge. They were generative grammarians. Educational viewpoints were also varied: some may stress activities and others, thinking for learning. These varied views emphasized different aspects of learning and teaching.

Thirdly, I must mention the change of social needs that may be brought about by political, economic or technological changes. We all feel that our society and its needs change with times. For example, right after Japan lost in WWII, suddenly we had to deal with the occupying Americans in English, and naturally, spoken English was particularly emphasized. I remember also that the appearance of tape-recorders changed the ways of language teaching. What we now call "language laboratory" appeared after tape-recorders came into

existence. Today, thanks to the modern means of transportation, many Japanese tourists and businessmen can visit foreign countries. For them, English is becoming more familiar for communication. On the other hand, many foreigners can visit Japan, and they are becoming more familiar with Japanese. Also, recently, the remarkable progress in computer technology is influencing not only language teaching and learning but also education in general. The advancement of computer technology may even create a situation in which students can learn languages entirely by themselves.

Now, let me briefly review and evaluate some of the characteristic theoretical features of representative approaches and methodologies.

When I was a student studying English about 70 years ago, I learned it primarily through grammar and translation. Then, when I started teaching English about 60 years ago, the prevailing methodology of foreign language teaching was based upon the principle called “oral approach” which has since been given another name, “audio-lingual approach.” Teaching methodology based upon the oral approach was also known in Japan as the “Fries Method,” or “Michigan Method.” This was because Dr. Charles Fries, a great advocate of oral approach, was teaching at the University of Michigan. As a young teacher of English, I was influenced by Dr. Fries, and decided to study under him at the University of Michigan. However, when I arrived there, I found out to my disappointment that Dr. Fries had just retired. So, I studied under the guidance of Dr. Robert Lado, who succeeded Dr. Fries. Dr. Lado was an excellent professor and he was also the Director of English Language Institute at that time for training foreign students in English at the University of Michigan. I still remember his speech to the new students at the 1957 matriculation ceremony. He emphasized that the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan had three basic principles for language teaching and said, “Principle Number One: Repeat! Principle Number Two: Repeat! Principle Number Three: Repeat!” I think that his speech reflects very well the idea of structural linguistics at the time which emphasized speech as primary in language and linguistic activities as habits. Such an idea was the basis for “pattern practice” that we often used for any language teaching, and it influenced English teaching in Japan greatly during the 1950’s, 60’s, and even 70’s. I might also add that Dr. Lado wrote a book by the title, “Linguistics across Cultures,” which reflects his ideas that are quite relevant to the theme of our symposium here today.

As a graduate student at the University of Michigan, I was lucky to get a position as a teaching assistant in Japanese. They had had a Japanese program for quite some time, and Professor Yamagiwa, a second generation Japanese

American as I understood, was in charge of the program. I remember that the first year textbook which Professor Yamagiwa wrote was all written in Roomaji, and it took some time for me to get used to the textbook. I must say that the textbook showed the basic idea of the emphasis upon “speech” for language teaching at that time.

The oral approach applied to classroom instruction through pattern practices, and repetitions subsequently became too mechanical and even boring, so teachers began to think about other effective ways of teaching. Several approaches and methodologies were proposed and coexisted with the oral approach, but I will mention one approach called the “cognitive approach,” which is associated with the ideas of generative grammar. The cognitive approach was well received by many teachers as a kind of reaction to the oral approach. As the term “cognitive” suggests, this approach emphasized the conscious understanding of the structure of language first before it was practiced and “internalized” in the brains. Once a sentence structure is internalized, the students will be able to produce many of their own sentences with the similar structure. Thus, linguistic activity was looked at as CREATION, NOT imitation. We can often observe such creation. For example, we often hear children’s sentences such as “This is gooder than that,” or “I goed there yesterday.” Apparently, the children are trying to follow the general grammatical rule of comparative form of adjectives for the former, and the rule of the past tense form of the verbs for the latter. They could not have heard those wrong forms from adults, and they could not have imitated adults’ language here. Not knowing extra-rules applicable to those forms, they have just created the wrong forms in accordance with the general rules, which they know. I consider that this is a good example which indicates that we use our linguistic structural knowledge to produce our own sentences creatively, not imitatively.

I must point out here that the oral approach and cognitive approach share some things in common. In particular, both of them emphasized linguistic structures, and the teaching materials were organized primarily in accordance with grammatical structures or categories. However, the difference is that the oral approach aimed at the development of students’ speech habits, while the cognitive approach emphasized the cultivation of student’s grammatical knowledge, or grammatical competence, with which they can produce any number of other sentences. Without such grammatical competence, a student cannot produce sentences of their own. After all, I must say that sentence production is not imitation but creation, and for the creation of sentences, the grammatical competence that the cognitive approach aims at is essential.

I must add that although both of those approaches emphasized grammar, they never neglected the communication aspects of language. Thus, there were often conversation practices in their classrooms, and they considered that as long as sentences were grammatical, the desired communication would naturally take place.

Although those approaches were later criticized as ineffective, I tend to believe that they are very good, particularly for the beginning students, and those approaches have succeeded in producing many good students, and I am inclined to give credit to those approaches. In fact, when I wrote my own textbook, “Foundations of Japanese Language,” the underlying principle was in the line with the cognitive approach.

In reaction to “grammatical competence,” the notion of “communicative competence” began to be noticed toward the end of the 1960’s. It was based upon the view that language is a social tool for communication, and it emphasized the communication aspect rather than structural aspect of language. Originally, the notion was proposed by an anthropological linguist, Dr. Dell Hymes. It emphasized the idea that along with the knowledge of producing grammatical sentences, a person ought to know when and to whom such sentences must be used. In this sense, it was fundamentally associated with specific styles of sentences such as politeness, formality, informality, etc. Thus, the term “communicative competence” was in reference to the knowledge of appropriate language use. Emphasizing the central idea of “communication,” some teachers even began to tolerate students’ errors, particularly at the lower level, as long as communication was possible. Primarily associated with speaking ability, the communicative approach is sensitive to students’ needs in situations that they may be in, or topics that they may talk about. Placing linguistic structure to the back burner, so to speak, the teaching materials were not based upon grammatical categories but upon communicative acts such as how to greet, how to introduce someone, how to make a phone call, etc.

As the communicative approach was enthusiastically received, both the oral approach and the cognitive approach were unfortunately characterized by some people even as “old fashioned.”

Derived from or associated with communicative approach, a few more approaches came to be noticed. There was the “Proficiency Oriented Approach,” which focused on the level of proficiency based upon accuracy. Then, there was “Monitor Model Approach,” known also as “Natural Approach,” which assumed that language acquisition would begin with listening, and after some listening period, speech would emerge spontaneously passing through stages similar to

native language acquisition. They claimed that grammatical explanation was not necessary, and grammar was useful only to monitor or correct errors. Language acquisition apparently meant “picking it up” rather than learning it. Then there were approaches called “Total Physical Response,” “Community Language Learning,” “Suggestopedia,” etc., which could all be categorized under the name of the “Humanistic Approach.” They emphasized that foreign languages should be learned in the most relaxed atmosphere through actions, music, pictures, games, etc. Since they were concerned with students’ psychological inhibition, they tended not to correct errors. Considering all those subcategories of communicative approach, I may summarize its basic points as follows: (1) Language is for communication and teaching aims at developing students’ communicative competence. (2) Communicative competence includes areas beyond grammatical competence and it must be acquired through activities or simulations, so the teaching materials are organized around situations and/or topics. (3) Although all four skill are important, listening and speaking are “crucial, and adults can acquire a second language like children can.

Interestingly, on some of those points, even the advocates of the oral or the cognitive approach must agree. For example, nobody can deny the fact that language is for communication, and that language teaching should aim at developing the students’ communicative competence. However, I must question its relative de-emphasis on the structure of language. In theory, at least, teaching materials arranged according to speech acts cannot logically be ordered or graded. For example, if a lesson deals with a speech act of “Making a Request,” for window closing, we have many ways of expressing the request. We can say, “Close the window,” or “Please close the window,” “Would you please close the window,” or “I would appreciate it if you would kindly close the window for me,” or even “It is chilly here,” etc. In Japanese, we can make the same kind of request by saying, “Mado o shimete kudasai,” or “Dooka, mado o shimete kudasaimasen ka,” or “Mado o shimete itadakitai no desu ga,” or “Kono heya wa chotto samui desu ne,” etc. There are many other ways of request with different degrees of politeness. Teaching all those together in one lesson is clearly out of the question. Obviously, it is most reasonable to teach structurally simpler ones first followed by more complex ones. If we seek this kind of solution, we invariably end up in coming back to the organizing principles of the oral approach or the cognitive approach. Therefore, I believe that grammar should be considered more fundamental for the arrangement of teaching materials for the lower level students.

The next question I have for ideas in the communicative approach concerns whether or not adults can learn a foreign language like children can. What I

question here is the idea of unconscious language acquisition applied to foreign language learning. This issue reminds me of the long debated issue of “direct” versus “indirect” methods. Rodrigues, a Portuguese missionary to Japan about 400 years ago, mentioned in one of his books that there were two ways of learning a foreign language.

One was to learn it like a native language, and the other, to study it according to the strict phonological and grammatical rules. He further said that the former would be good, but it would take a lot of time, while the latter would not comparatively take too much time, but it would tend to produce incorrect sentences unless the instructor gives correct information. I believe that he was right then, and he is right today. As Rodrigues said, I believe that an adult CAN learn a foreign language like a child learns his/her native language. However, it requires a lot of time. For teaching a foreign language at a school where time is usually limited, it is essential to think about most economical and effective ways of teaching. For that purpose, teachers should constantly be aware of what are easy as against what are difficult to learn and they should provide accurate information systematically to the students so that they can learn language systematically. I do not agree with the idea that a foreign language can be effectively “picked up” naturally or it can emerge spontaneously through just listening. I rather believe that effective teaching should be based upon the students’ conscious understanding of the structure of the target language first which they can apply to produce infinite number of their own new sentences. Needless to say, such new sentences should always be tested and practiced and tested again in the classroom. I think that is more economical, after all, for foreign language education at a school, and regardless of the remarkable advancement of computer technology, good teachers are always necessary for good guidance of the students to learn a foreign language well.

Here, I must say a few more words about grammar. Grammar should be looked at not as a corrective or restrictive device but as a device for sentence production and interpretation. Knowing grammar does not mean that one must be able to tell how an adjective is different from a verb or what a conditional construction is, etc. It means that one can produce and interpret an infinite number of sentences by applying a limited number of grammatical rules. Since grammar is a sentence production as well as a sentence interpretation device, I do not agree with the idea that grammar is useful only for monitoring or correcting sentences. In this sense, I agree with some of the communicative approach advocates who regard grammar as an important part of communicative approach. After all, for satisfactory communication, we need accurate sentences together with reasonable relationships between sentences, logical flow of

conversations, presuppositions relevant to the situation, etc. Therefore, along with some advocates of communicative approach, I must say that grammar is a part of communicative approach.

So far, I have discussed that the oral approach and cognitive approach emphasize primarily structural aspects of language at the lower level. When the students reach the level in which they have acquired the structure of the foreign language, the approach should emphasize different aspects of what the oral approach, or the cognitive approach primarily aims at. At this advanced level, students' enhancement and solidification of knowledge seem to be fundamentally important.

I have heard that some of the Japanese language school students are speaking Japanese at home to their parents, and English at school or elsewhere to their friends. Apparently, their knowledge of the basic structure of Japanese should be good, and they can produce their own sentences for communication. Therefore, I believe that they can be treated in the same way as advanced students. What they need at this level will be to enhance their extended Japanese language abilities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They have to be trained for logical conversations and speeches, for producing acceptable sentence styles according to the situations, for choosing right vocabulary items according to topics, and for using even nonverbal gestures accompanying the conversations, etc. Thus, they have to know more vocabulary items and phrases together with about 2,000 kanji that are commonly used in newspapers and journals in Japan. They have to know them not only for reading, but also for writing. In addition, depending upon the students' interests, vocabulary items and phrases specific to their interests and specialties should be enhanced at this level. Together with the idea of enhancement, solidification of knowledge is important. Thus, while reading some materials with the students, constant review sessions of important grammatical items are necessary to confirm the students' understanding of the structure of language. We know that these invariably require hard work on the part of the teachers and the students, but I have to emphasize that the more students read, write and think, the better they can learn.

Although at the advanced level, the communicative approach and its related approaches seem to be most effective, some of the ideas in the oral and the cognitive approaches are still useful at the advanced level, too. For example, the idea of "repetition" may even be useful at the advanced level for memorizing and internalizing vocabulary and phrase items. Also, repeated listening with a computer to the recorded reading of a story or a chapter in a textbook will certainly be very useful. In addition, listening to or singing Japanese songs

repeatedly, or seeing Japanese dramas or movies repeatedly will certainly be effective. A program for repeated active use of Japanese is also necessary. That is, not only speaking but also repeated active writing is to be stressed. I know that teachers will have to work hard making suggestions or corrections of the students' writings, but it will get a good result. Also, for active use of speech, a debate session in Japanese or a drama session will be very useful. Through those repeated communicative activities, the students' Japanese abilities will certainly be strengthened at the advanced level. I am sure that Japanese teachers can think of many other effective ways of teaching the students at the advanced level. I only emphasize two key words for effective teaching of the advanced students: enhancement and solidification.

So far, I have discussed three approaches: the oral approach, the cognitive approach, and the communicative approach. I think I have discussed some of their merits and short comings, and although each approach seems to be competitive with another, they should not be looked at as opposing views. Rather, each has its own merits and they should be looked at as complementary to one another. This reminds me of an old story of blind men and an elephant. Touching an elephant's tail, one says that an elephant is a thin long animal. Another touches the elephant's trunk and says that elephant is a long creature. Still another blind man, touching one of the elephant's four legs, says that elephant is a tree-like creature. All of them are partially right, but none of them are totally right. In a sense, we are like those blind men, and language is like an elephant. Language is related to various notions such as structures, meanings, communication, knowledge, habit, behavior, etc. Teaching also has many aspects such as students' psychology, motivation, aptitude, grades, etc. We must consider that what we call different approaches have been derived from varied emphasis on different aspects of language which gets connected to the notion of "how" to teach. Thus, some may advocate teaching through repetition, but others, through listening or singing. Some advocate that teaching materials must be organized according to topics, and other, according to structures. I do believe that for effective language teaching, all of those are important. Perhaps, we should only consider that simpler sentences should be taught before more complex ones and basic structures should be taught before more complex structures. When all those aspects are fully considered can language teaching become truly effective? In this sense, I find it difficult to subscribe to any one approach for all levels as better than another. I can only say that concerning methodologies of teaching a foreign language, there are all kinds of "HOW TO TEACH," which are changeable, and we should never forget unchangeable "WHAT TO TEACH." That is, we are teaching Japanese which is a postpositional language as against

English which is a prepositional language. Also, we are teaching Japanese which is a verb final language as against English which is a not verb final language. We are teaching Japanese which is a pitch accent language as against English which is a stress accent language. Japanese has a relative tense system, but English has an absolute tense system. These fundamental features of Japanese as against English do not change, and hopefully they have to be internalized in the student' brains at the lower level.

As I mentioned, teachers should supply enough correct information systematically to the students. I believe that the information should be relevant to the students' needs in accordance with their levels. I have discussed that there are various approaches and methodologies for supplying information to the students, and some may be recommended for one level, and some, for another level. However, there is one thing that is essential for any teaching. It is the teachers' extensive knowledge of the language that they are teaching. I believe that, by comparing English and Japanese, teachers have the responsibility to be aware of what are easy to learn and what are difficult to learn and why they are difficult to learn, etc. They should provide the information systematically to the students. In this sense, I believe that teachers are encouraged to be always interested in comparing two languages with their respective systems of sound, grammar, vocabulary, writing, and culture. This, I am aware, is a tremendous work for you teachers, and I will be always cheering for you.

Lastly, I would like to come back to *Kakehashi*. The three approaches I have discussed remind me of one of the *Kakehashi* in Nitobe Garden at UBC. As you know, there are two *Kakehashi* across the pond in the garden. One is a straight bridge, but the other is composed of three "half bridges" partially connected to one another to make a crooked whole bridge. I am interested in this crooked bridge. If I were to start walking across this bridge, I would soon come to the dead end of the first "half bridge." Since I would not want to fall into the pond, I would have to step aside to the second "half bridge" to proceed, but here again I would soon come to the dead end. If I were to try to proceed further, I would have to step aside again to the third "half bridge," which would take me successfully to the other side of the pond. I think that the crooked *Kakehashi* is very symbolic of the three approaches of foreign language teaching I have discussed. They need one another, and all of them together accomplish the goal of successful foreign language education.