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ABSTRACT

One of the current approaches to teaching second languages is the communicative approach. To improve the use of this approach in Shimane, Japan, it is necessary to discover the extent to which it is being used and what is hindering its use. This study examined the situation by asking native and non-native English postsecondary instructors to complete a questionnaire. A total of 36 out of 42 instructors at the universities and junior colleges in Shimane returned the questionnaire, 27 of whom were Japanese teachers of English. Data were collected using a series of statements that respondents rated on a Likert attitude scale. Results indicated that there was broad use of most elements of the communicative approach (e.g., work in small groups and pairs and use of authentic materials), but role play was not universally accepted. The main obstacle to using the communicative approach was students' reactions and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. Other obstacles included students' lack of confidence in their speaking ability, embarrassment, and inability to express their opinions, ask questions, and be innovative during conversation practice. (Contains 17 bibliographic references.) (SM)

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The Communicative Approach to Teaching English in Post-Secondary Institutions in Shimane, Japan

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Masters of Education

University of Southern Queensland
Australia

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Abstract

One of the current approaches to teaching a second language is the Communicative Approach. If the use of the Communicative Approach is going to continue to improve in Shimane, Japan, there is a need to discover to what extent it is being used and what is hindering the approach. In an effort to discover the actual situation, both native and non-native English instructors were asked to complete the questionnaire. Thirty-six out of the forty-two instructors at the universities and junior colleges in the prefecture of Shimane, Japan, returned the questionnaire for a return rate of eighty-six percent. Twenty-seven out of the thirty-six instructors are Japanese teachers of English. The data was collected using a series of statements evaluated on a Likert attitude scale. Based on the responses, it is apparent that there is broad use of most elements of the Communicative Approach, but role-play is not universally accepted. The study also discovered some obstacles that hinder the Communicative Approach. The largest challenge the instructors seem to face is the students' reactions and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. Hindrances that are discussed include the students' lack of confidence in their speaking ability, the students' embarrassment, and the inability of students to express their opinions, to ask questions, and to be innovative during conversation practice.

Certification of Research Project

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award.

Signature of Candidate | Date

Scott Menking

ENDORSMENT

Signature of Supervisor | Date

Francis Mangubhai

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Objectives

This research addresses two issues. First, the study examines how extensively the communicative method of teaching English as a second language, specifically in speaking and listening courses, is used in post-secondary institutions in the prefecture of Shimane, Japan. Second, the study explores some of the hindrances to the use of the Communicative Approach in these institutions. Hindrances are those things that inhibit the approach from being used effectively. Items relating to major elements of the Communicative Approach are used to assess how much the instructors use the approach and to identify whether the fundamentals of the approach are understood. In addition, the questionnaire has items relating to whether the students are in some way rejecting features of the approach. The study relies on the instructors to honestly evaluate their own use of, and understanding of, the features of the Communicative Approach. This study also relies on the instructors' past observations of students.

Once the instructors are aware of what hindrances exist, foreign language instruction in Shimane, Japan, can begin to improve. It is realized that overcoming obstacles to the approach is a difficult task that can not be easily accomplished. But, by being aware of the hindrances, the instructors can take the first step toward improving learning experiences for the students. In December 2000, Education Minister Nakasone established a panel of experts to "discuss ways to overhaul English teaching methods and high school and university entrance examinations" (Redford and Matsuzawa 2000, p. 10). Smaller studies, such as this one, may prove helpful in assessing the current situation in various parts of the country. This research assesses the current situation in Shimane. As the scope of this research is limited, no attempt is made to extrapolate the results to a national level.

Terminology

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching. CLT is also referred to as the Communicative Approach.

Communicative Approach (CA): An approach to learning a second language based on the theory that "the purpose of language (and thus the goal of language teaching) is communication" (Celce-Murcia 1991, p.8-9).

Communicative competence: The ability to, within specific contexts, express ideas to others and to interpret the intended meaning of what was conveyed by others (Brown 1994, p.227).

Grammar-Translation Method: An approach to studying a foreign language "first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language" (Richards and Rodgers 1998, p. 3).

EFL: English as a foreign language.

L1: The mother tongue or first language.

L2: The second or target language.

Likert attitude scale: The Likert scale contains "a number of points on a scale, quite often five, but typically an odd number. The points have designations such as 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' " (Wiersma 1995, p. 319).

Meaning: Communicating a mutual understanding of a point, which may or may not be perfectly linguistically correct, but which still conveys information and ideas that are intelligible to the individuals involved.

Post-secondary schools: Universities, colleges, and junior colleges. For this study, technical colleges are not included in the term "post-secondary schools."

Target Language: The language that is being studied.

Western cultures: Cultures that are European in nature, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Literature Review

Many of the modern English as a second language textbooks and much of the recently published research concentrate on the Communicative Approach. In the early 1970s, the "Communicative Approach grew out of the work of linguists," including Halliday and Hymes, who "view[ed] language first and foremost as a system for communication" (Celce-Murcia 1991, p. 8). The Communicative Approach is also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards and Rodgers 1998). The Communicative Approach was started, in part, by the rejection "in the belief that consciously learning the grammar of a language will necessarily result in an ability to use the language" (Yule 1996, pp. 193-194). Before the creation of the Communicative Approach, language classrooms were sterile environments, and CLT was created to address language as something to be understood as more than just scientifically or grammatically based. Since the 1970s, the Communicative Approach has grown and developed (Richards and Rodgers 1998). The former Japanese State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ichita Yamamoto, was quoted as saying, "Japanese political leaders also need to have sufficient English ability to be able to convey messages... by appearing on television shows even with no notice" (Toda and Mohara 2000, p. 8). This focus on overall communicative competence can best be seen in the Communicative Approach, which "acknowledge[s] the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers 1998, p. 66).

"Communicative competence can be defined... as the ability to use the L2 accurately, appropriately, and flexibly" (Yule 1998, p. 197). As Richards and Rodgers (1998, p. 71) noted in their discussion of Swain (1980), there are four dimensions of communicative competence. The first, grammatical competence, includes an understanding of grammar rules and the correct use of both these rules and words during communication (Yule 1998; Richards and Rodgers 1998). Sociolinguistic competence is necessary so that the listener and the speaker understand communication within a social context. This includes "role relationships, the shared information of the participants, and the communicative purpose of their interaction" (Richards and Rodgers 1998, p. 71). Discourse competence refers to the communication of meaning within a situation (Richards and Rodgers 1998). Strategic competence includes "coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair, and redirect communication" (Richards and Rodgers 1998, p. 71).

Richards and Rodgers (1998, pp. 67-68) cited Finocchiaro and Brumfit's features (1983) of the Communicative Approach, including:

a. Meaning is paramount.
b. Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
c. Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
d. Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.
e. The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
f. Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
g. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

Celce-Murcia (1991, p. 8) gave a list of aspects included in the Communicative Approach.

a. It is assumed that the goal of language teaching is learner ability to communicate in the target language.
b. The content of a language course will include semantic notions and social functions, not just linguistic structures.
c. Students regularly work in groups or pairs to transfer (and, if necessary, negotiate) meaning in situations where one person has information that the other(s) lack.
d. Students often engage in role-play or dramatization to adjust their use of the target language to different social contexts.
e. Classroom materials and activities are often authentic to reflect real-life situations and demands.
f. [All four skills] are integrated from the beginning.
g. The teacher's role is primarily to facilitate communication and only secondarily to correct errors.
h. The teacher should be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately.

It is obvious, therefore, that the Communicative Approach emphasizes meaning along with form/grammar. In Vietnam, G. Ellis (1994) found that there was a concentration on the correctness of single words and not the meaning of the sentence that was being conveyed. Wolff (1994) also found that an overemphasis on grammar was hindering communication in classrooms in Europe. If this hindrance can be

found in several countries, it is appropriate to discover whether it is also occurring in Shimane.

A post-secondary education study done by Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) studied one near-native speaking and fifteen native-speaking instructors in Japan who had been educated in Western post-graduate courses. The study focused on how these instructors changed their teaching methods in response to the Japanese classroom and addressed some of the barriers to teaching with the Communicative Approach. Within the confines of the sixteen instructors, Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) found positive evidence of the use of the Communicative Approach when it was discovered that there was an emphasis on meaning more than form/grammar. In emphasizing meaning over grammar, the communicative task can be given before the grammar. If, however, the learner performs better with an explanation before the communication, then a grammar explanation should be given before an attempt is made to communicate (Eisenstein 1987). Based on the Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor study (1996), it would seem there has been a change from stressing form/grammar to emphasizing meaning. Although this study provided some insights, the study did not address what non-native English speaking instructors are doing in their classrooms. Throughout the world, the number of non-native instructors outnumbers the number of native-speaking instructors (Fromkin et al. 1996). It would seem, therefore, that further study with Japanese instructors who have not studied in Western countries is warranted.

Kitajima's case study (1997) reviewed the use of the Communicative Approach at one university in Japan. The study concentrated on the communicative strategies of students. While a control group studied with form-focused instruction, two experimental groups studied with meaning-focused instruction. The three groups were compared by using pre- and post-test results. Comparing the two meaning-focused groups, there was no statistical difference between the students who were instructed on how to use communicative strategies and those students who were not. Students in both experimental groups who were taught with the Communicative Approach progressed in the ability to verbally communicate. This was in contrast to the control group that studied with the Grammar-Translation Method. This example demonstrated the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach. It follows, therefore, that discovering hindrances to the approach will directly and positively effect learning.

A common point of investigation by Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) in Japan, Karavas-Doukas (1996) in Greece, and G. Ellis (1994) in Vietnam focused on whether the classes were teacher centered or student centered. The instructors in the Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor study (1996) tried to be more student centered, but to some extent, they failed. G. Ellis (1994) found that not only were the classes not teacher centered but there was no attempt to make the classes student centered. Karavas-Doukas (1996) discovered that most classes were teacher centered and focused on form. To make a classroom student centered, the instructor must change their role from leader to facilitator (Richards and Rodgers 1998). In the role of a facilitator, the instructor tries to help the students take more control, most often by giving the students more time to practice verbal exercises. As a facilitator, the instructor spends less time speaking as a lecturer, so the students spend more time actively participating.

In Japan, Caprio (1988) and Miyao (1996) successfully created communicative classrooms that were student centered. Caprio (1988) accomplished this by becoming a facilitator who combined all four language skills in one course. Miyao (1996) used the Communicative Approach to promote communicative writing through e-mail. Miyao's study (1996) mentioned that using e-mail may help the students to speak more communicatively. The study noted that because the students were e-mailing each other, the lessons and exercises were student centered. Because a main emphasis of the Communicative Approach is the student-centered classroom (Richards and Rodgers 1998), various statements were included in the questionnaire in order to determine whether instructors in Shimane have student-centered classrooms.

As classes become student-centered, the scoring of speaking ability becomes more important. Nakamura (1992, 1996, 1997, 1999, and 2000) has shown that there is a growing trend to evaluate the verbal communication skills of university students in Japan. This is significant because what is tested should be a reflection of what is taught in the classroom (Heaton 1997). Starting with the 1992 paper, Nakamura studied how native speakers and non-native speakers of English evaluate students. He found a discrepancy between the two groups in terms of the importance placed on and the evaluation of such things as fluency, content, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. In 1996, Nakamura progressed into rater reliability and the use of rating sheets for both monologue and dialogue tests. Nakamura (2000) also discussed a

measurement model that allows instructors to evaluate students' conversations globally, judging skills as a whole, and locally, focusing on one specific ability.

Others have also begun to focus on assessing verbal communication. For example, Nunn (2000) discussed continuous assessment of members of small groups in Japanese classrooms. Small groups create a more natural environment for practicing interactive skills that are needed to be an active conversation participant. Nunn (2000) stated that small group evaluation should judge social skills such as taking turns, nominating speakers, and defending opinions. The fact that some instructors are evaluating these skills indicates that the skills are being taught in at least some Japanese foreign language classrooms. Skills such as those mentioned by Nunn are essential for sociolinguistic competence, which is the ability to understand in what situations utterances are appropriate or inappropriate. Kitao's study (1993) of sociolinguistic competence revealed that Japanese students of communicative English lack the ability to understand when indirectness is appropriate or why a different word choice is preferred. Korst (1997) discussed classroom activities that help Japanese students become more aware of sociolinguistic skills, such as asking for clarifications. Clearly, verbal assessment, and consequently, participation in class, is becoming more important. As such, the instructors were asked what aspects are considered in deciding term grades in speaking classes.

Kumaravadivelu (1993, p. 13) suggested one strategy for creating a communicative classroom is to "utilize learning opportunities created by learners." In doing so, students' ideas increase the meaningfulness of classroom activities. In a similar manner, Miyao (1996) concluded that a real or authentic audience promotes independent learning. In creating a communicative classroom, Caprio (1998) had the learners bring authentic materials, things that they were interested in, to class.

Furmanovsky (1996) discussed using video in content courses. This combination of visual and audio input is a good way to bring authentic material into the classroom. Although content courses, which use English to teach another subject, were discussed, many concepts are applicable to English-as-a-Foreign-Language classes in Japanese universities. Video format is interesting to many students, since it combines visual and audio stimulation and is not in the form of a textbook. Furmanovsky (1996, p. 2) noted, however, that video at the students' developmental level and with "an appropriate balance of content and language" must be selected. He suggested using various sources for the videos, including documentaries, movies, TV

commercials, public service announcements, and government propaganda. Exercises or activities, used in conjunction with the authentic input of the videos, were also suggested. By doing this, not only listening skills but also speaking and conversation skills can be practiced. The use of authentic materials is an important aspect of the Communicative Approach, and several individuals in Japan have indicated that they use authentic materials. As such, it was deemed important to determine whether authentic materials are being widely utilized in Shimane.

Celce-Murcia and Goodwin (1991) supported the idea of teaching pronunciation as part of the Communicative Approach because if learners of a second language are to be understood, they must have phonetic accuracy. Bray (1995) found that by using poems that are short and rhythmical, learners can produce utterances that are more clearly understood. Bray (1995) went on to explain that compared to the English language, the Japanese language lacks the rhythm and stress that is needed in English to produce clear utterances. Because of this difference, Japanese learners of communicative English need to have activities that help them learn pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation. However, both G. Ellis (1994) and Zhang (1997) noted that the instructors lacked confidence in their second language skills. Based on this research, it seemed prudent to determine whether a lack of oral proficiency is hindering the approach and to ascertain how pronunciation is being viewed by the instructors in Shimane.

David Nunan (1987, p.141) noted that "[a] classroom constraint is the attitude of the learners themselves." Nearly ten years later, this problem still existed when Yuen's study (1996) indicated that Japanese college and university students' expectations of how English conversation classes should be taught may be different than how the instructors are conducting lessons. Yuen's study (1996) concluded that the students want more of a free-talk style of class with few restrictions, a style, he noted, that conflicts with how most instructors conduct conversation lessons. Pacek (1996) not only discovered resistance from students and parents but also from other teachers who had not participated in the training in England. Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) found that the instructors made deviations from the standard features of the Communicative Approach in an attempt to make the approach usable after having adverse reactions by the students to the communicative style of teaching. As a result, a questionnaire statement was made to determine whether the Shimane instructors have adjusted their approach in order to teach more effectively. In addition, the

instructors were given the opportunity to discuss adverse reactions they have experienced.

Both the G. Ellis study (1994) and the Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor study (1996) found that practicing the speaking skill was difficult. Some teachers in G. Ellis' study (1994) were using choral repetition to practice the speaking skill, but these techniques do not fall within the Communicative Approach (Richards and Rodgers 1998; Celce-Murcia 1991). G. Ellis (1994) attributed this to a non-communicative teaching style and to the students' inability to stay on task in using the target language. Wolff (1994, p. 5) found that one of the problems consistently mentioned by instructors at the higher education level in Europe was the difficulty in "using only the target language." In a communicative foreign language classroom, there is a concern regarding the judicious use of the L1. Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) also noticed that, based on interviews with the instructors and observations made of the classes, there was a lot of L1 use, especially since the students were not always using the target language when practicing in small groups or pairs. Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) concluded that the students do not realize that the target language can be used to communicate not only answers to questions on a test but also a variety of information in real-life situations. Terdal, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) went on to note that although not all of the students had this problem, it was a prevalent problem. Based on these studies, the instructors were asked to respond to a statement that students stray from the target language during pair and small group exercises.

As Brown (1994, p. 187) noted, "Language and culture are inextricably intertwined." Gregory Ellis' study (1994) in Vietnam mainly dealt with the cultural and historical ideological differences between Western cultures and Vietnam and with the wide gap between the teaching practices in Vietnam and the Communicative Approach. Even though Japan and Vietnam are different, many of the theories can be adapted to the Japanese context since both are non-Western countries. A major part of G. Ellis' investigation (1994) concentrated on the importance of understanding the culture of the target language. Yule (1996 p. 246) emphasized this importance when he wrote, "Linguistic variation is tied very much to the existence of different cultures." If one person is going to communicate with a person from a different culture, then there must be an understanding of the other culture to clearly communicate meaning. There are a lot of nuances, such as taking turns, pauses, and body language, which help the listener understand what the other person is trying to convey. These

nuances, however, may be misinterpreted by people from other cultures. Additionally, when the value structure is different, an utterance that is very clear to one person can be confusing or misunderstood by the other (Yalden 1996).

Alptekin (1993) also observed that the culture of the target language always enters into the study of a second language. Furthermore, the instructors' understanding and the students' understanding of social interaction in the target language may be different. The expression of anger in English is one such example. Toya and Kodis' investigation (1996) concluded that teaching how to express anger is needed in communicative courses in Japan. Japanese students who can express a wide range of emotions will be better able to communicate in Western society. Based on this research, a questionnaire item addressed the issue of cultural differences that make it more difficult for the students to learn English. Another questionnaire item examined the issue of miscommunications between native and non-native speakers that are created by cultural differences.

By understanding the students' native culture, the instructor can help students grasp cultural differences between the L1 and the L2. J. Ellis (1993), in his study of Japanese university students studying abroad in Canada, found that Japanese learners have a unique social organization. This finding is substantiated by Pacek's post-course study (1996) of Japanese teachers of English in secondary schools in Japan. Pacek (1996) found that while the instructors attended a one-year program at the University of Birmingham in England, they had positive attitudes toward CLT. After these instructors returned to Japan, however, they found it difficult to implement the CLT methodology for a number of reasons. One problem participants encountered after returning to Japan was that CLT methods did not work in the Japanese culture. The environment has a direct effect on the interactions of learners.

There are, therefore, aspects of the Japanese social structure that may be limiting the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach. J. Ellis (1993) noted that one social phenomenon is relationships between older and younger people. In Japan, careful consideration is given to the "sempai--kohai" relationship. J. Ellis (1993, p. 14) explained that out of respect for older students, even those who are just one year older, younger students may "avoid participating for fear of offending their 'superiors'." Social position in the Japanese communicative classroom is a legitimate concern when planning pair and small group activities. Another cultural aspect was discovered by Miyao (1996), who found that by using e-mail and spell-check

programs, the students had less anxiety about writing to others, whether they were friends or instructors. She explained that the anxiety of making mistakes in front of others is a substantial barrier for many Japanese students to overcome.

The group culture prevails in Japan. Alarid and Wang (1997) referred to it as Groupism and postulated that Japan's group mentality originated from agricultural practices hundreds of years ago. Japanese students avoid standing out from their peers, whether it be for good or bad reasons; this can be attributed to the value placed on group harmony (McGuire 1992). The Japanese are sensitive to anything that may make them appear different from others. The school systems are designed to produce a homogeneous student body, and as a result, the students are not divided into high achievers and low achievers (Yoshida 1994). Instead, the high achievers are encouraged to help others; this encourages co-operation in groups. This, in turn, reduces the likelihood that students will want to stand out and encourages students to be average, rather than above or below the norm. The goal, as both Alarid and Wang (1997) and Yoshida (1994) noted, is for everyone to succeed. Working with Japan's group philosophy has benefits, but it also has the potential to create challenges in the communicative classroom. Items in the questionnaire were designed to determine whether Groupism, the anxiety of making mistakes, or other cultural aspects are limiting the students from fully participating in communicative activities.

G. Ellis' study (1994) in Vietnam found that another reason the instructors did not use the Communicative Approach was because they were not greatly exposed to it. The instructors did not have an educational background in the Communicative Approach. Based on this, the instructors were asked how they learned the Communicative Approach, as well as their general educational background.

Examinations have restricted the use of the Communicative Approach in China and in Japan. In China, pressure was placed on the instructors to insure that students passed government standardized exams (Zhang 1997). Because of this, the instructors were reluctant to change for fear of the students failing these exams and for fear of pressure from superiors if the instructors deviated from the prescribed method. Pacek (1996) found that one problem instructors returning to Japan from overseas faced was the need of the students to have instruction in grammar rules in order to pass national university entrance exams. As McGuire (1992) noted, entrance to Japanese universities is based almost entirely on entrance exam scores. Because

national exams test grammar knowledge and not communicative ability, Pacek (1996) found that the instructors wanted more ideas on how to improve EFL within this constraint. Yuen's study (1996, p. 6) of Japanese college students also noted that they "are traumatized by exam English and so regard any formalized fashion of studying English with suspicion." As such, it was deemed important to determine whether the instructors are being limited by proficiency examinations. The instructors were also probed to determine whether preparation for university entrance exams has positively or negatively effected students' speaking ability.

The change in emphasis from grammar to communication can be seen in the creation of the Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, a national program which has brought thousands of native speakers into Japanese junior and senior high school classrooms. The focus of English education in Japanese junior high and senior high schools has shifted from grammar and vocabulary study for exams to a combined focus of passing examinations and communication (Baskin 1996). Currently, more than 6000 JET program participants are working in Japan (The Daily Yomiuri 31 July 2001, p.8). Presumably, as the junior and senior high schools become more communicative, so will post-secondary education. In Japan, national competency testing in the English language is changing to reflect this new emphasis on listening and speaking skills (Nishimura 2000). The Japanese Standard Test of English Proficiency (STEP), a graduated test with six levels, has implemented listening and speaking components at the higher levels. As the educational environment continues to change in junior and senior high schools, the students' abilities and confidence levels will increase. As a result, changes to become more communicative at the post-secondary level will be necessary. It is worthwhile, therefore, to determine what is presently hindering the Communicative Approach in post-secondary educational institutions.

Methodology

Scientific traditions, such as the survey method, focus on a small number of questions that are constructed before data collection and cover a wide range of elements (LeCompte and Goetz 1982). Survey research "measures opinions" and is "probably the single most widely used research type in educational research" (Wiersma 1995, p. 169). The survey method, rather than another method, was chosen because this study explored the opinions and the attitudes of the instructors. This survey used the technique of the questionnaire. It was thought that by sending a questionnaire to the subjects, the natural setting of the instructors' offices would not be disturbed. Compared to interviews with the instructors, the questionnaire is more relaxing and therefore more accurately examines the instructors' approaches to teaching (Wiersma 1995). By using a questionnaire, any error or bias that could result from using a number of interviewers was eliminated (Wiersma 1995).

A survey instrument, such as a questionnaire, does have a weakness of data error. The potential for bias entering the data because of a limited subject range is a distinct disadvantage of the survey method. In addition, it is possible for the person to answer with what h/she thinks should be answered, rather than his/her true position or feeling. As Wiersma (1995, p.191) explained, however, when dealing with educational professionals, the reliability of honest answers is high, unless there are some sensitive items that could degrade or attack the individual. These types of items were avoided.

The survey design was cross-sectional, which Wiersma (1995, p. 175) defined as "data collection at one point in time." The cross-sectional design was chosen because of the time-saving logistics. A longitudinal design, in which data is collected at several points in time, would require more time (Wiersma 1995) than was allotted for this directed study project. An advantage of using interviewers rather than questionnaires, however, is that the return rate or completion rate drastically increases (Wiersma 1995). In order to avoid a low return rate, the instructors were encouraged to complete the questionnaire. Those instructors who did not complete the questionnaire by the first deadline were sent a follow-up letter. Personal contact also helped to increase the rate of return. However, some instructors simply refused to complete the questionnaire for a variety of reasons. A return rate of 86 percent was achieved. There is a lower chance of bias entering the data because of this rate of return.

This scientific study addressed the study's objectives with statistical data gathered from the questionnaire. The data was collected by asking about specific attitudes and opinions of the instructors in the post-secondary field of teaching English as a Second Language in Shimane, Japan. In order to discuss the objectives put forth, the responses were analyzed using response percentages, and related items were compared. The cross-sectional design of the questionnaire was based on a "time-bound" association rather than a "time-ordered" association because the items can not be placed in any chronological order (Allen 1999, p. 3.29). Because the study was limited to the prefecture of Shimane, the internal validity is high. Internal validity, as stated by Wiersma (1995, p. 6), is "'the extent to which the results of a research study can be interpreted accurately and with confidence." But, by concentrating on a small population, the external validity to generalize the results outside of Shimane decreased. Because of this relatively weak external validity, the results can not be generalized to the national level. That is not to say that a reader may not be able to apply some aspects to his/her situation. The research, however, can not make such generalizations.

Questionnaire construction

Plans for construction of the questionnaire were drawn from Borg and Gall (1983) and from Wiersma (1995). From these two main readings, it was determined that, in order to make it easier to tabulate data and analyze the results, selected-response items were preferable. It was also believed that selected-response items would make the questionnaire seem less threatening to the instructors. Leading questions were avoided (Gay 1992). Noting Wiersma's warning (1995) about making the questionnaire too long, care was taken to be as concise as possible. In order to avoid complex items that could produce inaccurate data, an attempt was made to have each item contain only one concept. As a result, the questionnaire was long, but the length was necessary in order to fully examine the objectives. If open-ended items had been used, tabulation would have taken an exorbitant amount of time, and more importantly, there would have been an increase in the chance of making interpretation mistakes.

The questionnaire has two sections (see appendix). The first section, asking for biographical information, is quite long, but the information was necessary since it "identifies the individual in terms of classifying variables for the analysis" (Wiersma 1995, p. 176). The next section contains items that deal with elements of the Communicative Approach and with possible hindrances. In order to decrease

preconceptions, headings were not used. Many of the items were narrowed to the speaking skill to make a shorter questionnaire and to gather more specific data. Anticipating that some instructors do not teach and have never taught speaking, the Likert scale has a response of (F), not applicable, in the second section of the questionnaire. Additionally, Borg and Gall (1983) noted that it is important to give instructors this option so that they are not forced to choose an answer that does not accurately reflect their opinion. To avoid any misunderstanding, a conscious effort was made to use terms that all of the instructors know. In order to allow the instructors to comment upon past experiences, two open-ended questions are at the end of the questionnaire. Because of the length of the questionnaire, these questions were made optional.

Based upon previous studies discussed in the literature review, it seemed prudent to address the following issues:

1. use of elements of the Communicative Approach;
2. how instructors view students and the students' actions in class, as well as whether these actions are seen as hindrances to effective teaching;
3. whether student-centered classes are being utilized;
4. the average class size and whether this is seen as a deterrent.

The cover letter was constructed using suggestions from Wiersma (1995) and Borg and Gall (1983) to make a professional, yet friendly, introductory letter that explained the research. A Shimane Women's Junior College professor who has conducted many surveys advised that the letter be very direct and explain that the survey was being done in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree. As suggested by Professor Ito (2000, pers. comm., 8 March), the instructors confidentiality was guaranteed. In addition to enclosing a self-addressed stamped envelope, the cover letter stated the researcher's appreciation for the time and effort that would be spent in completing the questionnaire. An attempt was made to keep the letter simple and the directions minimal, so as not to prejudice the instructors in any way. A return date of one week was given so the instructors had time to complete the questionnaire but not so much time that it was forgotten (Borg and Gall 1983).

Trialing

The trialing of the questionnaire was done following suggestions from Borg and Gall (1983) and Wiersma (1995). The questionnaire was given to three individuals who are instructors of English as a second language in post-secondary institutions in

Shimane prefecture. Two native speakers of English and one near-native speaker were asked to give constructive criticism of the instrument. Both native and non-native speakers of English were chosen, since the questionnaire was distributed to native and non-native speakers. The advice of one of the individuals, in particular, was helpful. In response to the comments, the final form of the questionnaire was developed. Some items were removed; others were added or improved. Due to the trialing process, some poorly formed questions were eliminated.

Distribution of Instrument

The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted after the busy start of the school year in April but before other time-consuming events generally start. The questionnaires were placed into each individual's office mail box at the prefectural universities. As the surveys were put into the office mailboxes, the instructors' names were marked on a list as being delivered. Announcements were made by the department heads at the university English faculty meetings to encourage the faculty to fill out the questionnaire. The instructors at the junior college, the nursing college, and the medical university were contacted in person, as there are fewer faculty. The questionnaires asked each instructor to give his/her name and institution for record keeping purposes. When the questionnaire was returned, the instructor was checked off the list. As an additional quality control measure, different postage stamps were used on the return envelopes of each institution. In this way, if an instructor did not write his/her name, it was possible to determine which institution the questionnaire came from. Following Wiersma's suggestion (1995), follow-up letters with another copy of the questionnaire and another return envelope were sent to those who did not return the questionnaire. An effort was also made to visit each instructor to personally ask that the questionnaire be completed.

Population

The population for this survey was defined as all instructors of English as a foreign language, both native speakers and non-native speakers, at the two national universities, the national medical university, the prefectural nursing college, and the prefectural junior college in Shimane, Japan. The universities and junior colleges share instructors, and the teaching goals seem to be similar. Unlike in the United States and other countries, medical university is quite similar to university in Japan. Students enter medical university after high school and study for six years. Because the aims and educational systems are quite different at technical colleges, it was decided that instructors from those institutions would not be included. Because there

were only 42 teachers within the set perimeters, it was decided that the survey study would take a census of the entire population, and as such, no sampling plan was required (Wiersma 1995; Borg and Gall 1983). One of the main reasons for submitting the survey to all English as a foreign language instructors, and not only the native-speaking instructors, was because Terdel, Dunn, and Gaynor (1996) only studied native-speaking instructors. Most of the second language instruction around the world is done by non-native speakers (Fromkin et al. 1996), so including non-native speakers, as well as native speakers of English, produced research that is more representative of the overall situation.

The population of instructors was ascertained from class lists and from lists of instructors maintained by the respective English departments and institutions. The names were then confirmed with the published list of all the instructors in Shimane prefecture. If the instructors taught literature exclusively, they were not included in the population. Thirty-six out of the 42 English instructors at the universities and junior colleges in Shimane returned the questionnaire survey. This is a return rate of 86 percent. Seventy-eight percent, or 28 of the instructors, indicated that they currently teach or have in the past taught speaking/conversation and listening (SCL). Because the focus of this study was the use of the Communicative Approach in speaking and listening courses, this group has been analyzed unless otherwise noted.

In this sub-group of 28 English instructors, 9 are native English speakers and 19 are Japanese instructors of English. Four instructors hold a Bachelor's degree, while 21 instructors have earned a Master's degree. Two instructors have a Doctorate, and one has an advanced degree in American Justice. When asked about the highest degree earned, Literature and Education were indicated by eight people each. Only three people earned a degree in Applied Linguistics, and one instructor's degree was in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Eighty-two percent of the instructors indicated that they have had to adjust the approach that they originally learned. Fifty percent of the instructors have been teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for 12 or more years, while only 7 percent indicated they have been teaching for two years or less.

Analysis of Aspects of the Communicative Approach

To determine to what extent the Communicative Approach is being used, statements directly pertaining to the features of the approach were used. Various statements about each element of the approach were devised to test consistency in response. The frequency of the answers on the Likert scale was calculated on a percent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire appear in brackets after each subject heading. Unless the population is specified as the entire group of instructors, the analysis is based on the speaking/conversation and listening (SCL) instructors.

Focus on Meaning (3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 15, 16, 18, 19)

Emphasizing the conveyance of meaning in communication is a fundamental tenet of the Communicative Approach, and some instructors are, in fact, valuing meaning. In response to the statements, *My speaking classes focus less on form/grammar and more on meaning* and *My speaking classes focus mostly on form/grammar*, 57 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed to the first statement and 57 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed to the second statement. The use of communicative activities is another indication that learning to communicate is not only focused on grammar. Forty-six percent of the instructors indicated they use over 50 percent of class time on communicative activities. Furthermore, 64 percent of the instructors indicated that they do not spend a large part of the class period having students repeat phrases. Only 3.5 percent of the instructors strongly agreed to the use of repeating. Repeating is a rote memory exercise that is not part of the Communicative Approach.

The instructors are concerned with proper grammar usage, but they also believe that an ability to communicate can be accomplished with imperfect grammar. Eighty-three percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, *I encourage students to convey meanings without penalty, even if they use incorrect form/grammar.* In direct correlation, 93 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed that it is acceptable, at times, for students to make form/grammar mistakes in the pursuit of conveying meaning. This is in contrast to the past when correct grammar was of the utmost importance in Japan.

In conveying meaning, grammar is used. While grammar is used during instruction, a majority of the instructors in Shimane are not emphasizing grammar rules but

rather the inherent use of grammar. As such, communicative activities stress the conveyance of meaning between people. That is not to say, however, that grammar is being ignored. Seventy-five percent of the SCL instructors agreed or strongly agreed that grammar, pronunciation, and spelling must be taught with speaking. Forty-one percent of the general population and 53 percent of the SCL group agreed or strongly agreed with the presentation of a communicative task before explaining the grammar. Another 41 percent of the general population and 39 percent of the SCL instructors were neutral to the concept. Because people such as Eisenstein (1987) have acknowledged that it is acceptable to give the grammar first, this response does not clearly oppose the Communicative Approach.

On reflection of these statistics, it is evident that conveying meaning is considered paramount in English classroom instruction and that this aspect of the Communicative Approach is being used by over half of the instructors. At this level of education, the students have been studying English for six or more years. It might prove beneficial to increase the emphasis on meaning during speaking and communication instruction for those instructors who are not already doing so.

Emphasis on Grammar (3, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28)

Forty-three percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed and another 43 percent were neutral to the statement, *I encourage students to strive for correct form/grammar.* When considering the previous section, one can conclude that the intent is probably not to focus on grammar but rather to encourage students to correctly use the grammar they already know. The correct use of grammar increases understanding between participants and gives the listener the impression that the speaker is well educated. If, however, learners of English as a foreign language do not try to communicate meaning for fear of using incorrect grammar, they will not be able to improve communicative skills. The tenet of using grammar to construct understandable utterances seems to be accepted and used by instructors in Shimane.

The acceptable level of deviation from correct grammar varies widely between individuals and can not be defined without using many examples, since the question of when and how often to correct grammar is an individual, professional choice. In addition, the same instructor may have different parameters for grammar correction, based on the teaching style and the goal of the lesson and/or class. How grammar is corrected is related to what kind of grammar is being corrected. All of these factors, as well as others that have not been discussed, add to the complexity of when, how,

and how often grammar correction is done. As a result, the degree of deviation was deemed beyond the scope of this research. Instead, a general statement, *In my reactions with students I correct their form/grammar more than 50% of the time,* was used. Possibly because what constitutes correcting grammar was not clearly defined, the response was divided with 43 percent of the instructors disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, 32 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 25 percent remaining neutral. Some of the other statements concerning the emphasis of communication rather than grammar/form were more positively accepted, and this difference may lie in definitions. More in-depth investigation is warranted.

Grammar is an important part of language instruction, and correct grammar usage is important in the production of English. This was reflected in a statement that in order to be able to communicate, not only speaking but also grammar, pronunciation, and spelling must be taught. Seventy-five percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed. In fact, 50 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed that the university entrance exam system, with it's emphasis on grammar, positively affected the way students were taught a second language in high school. The instructors did not, however, imply that this system helps the students develop their speaking ability. Sixty-one percent of the instructors disagreed or strongly disagreed that university entrance exams help the students develop their speaking ability. At the post-secondary level, learners can use previously learned grammar in communication.

Student-centered Classroom (items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14)

One of the main features of the Communicative Approach is giving the students the chance to practice the target language and have an active role in the learning process. There are positive indications that some instructors are trying to be facilitators and have student-centered classrooms. Forty-three percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed that their classes are more student centered than teacher centered. Another 43 percent of the instructors were neutral to the statement. Having student-centered classrooms is also evident by the fact that 54 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed that their main role in the classroom is to be a facilitator. In addition, 36 percent of the instructors were neutral to the statement. Sixty-five percent of the instructors noted that pair work and small group exercises are part of the classroom activities.

When presented with a statement that the students have more speaking time in class than the instructor, the respondents were evenly divided with 39 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing and 35 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This is an unexpected response in light of the answers to the first three statements. One would expect a lower rate of disagreement. One explanation for these variances could be in the definition of student-centered classrooms. Instructors may be defining their classes as student centered even though the students do not speak more than the instructors. Other explanations may exist. Further investigation is necessary to determine how student-centered classes are defined and conducted. Without student-centered classrooms, the Communicative Approach is not as effective as it could be.

Speaking and listening are skills that need to be exercised, much like practicing a sport to improve playing performance. Mastering a second language is not the result of listening to an instructor tell the students what to do and how to do it, but rather, the Communicative Approach asserts, it is the result of students actively trying to listen, speak, and write. In facilitating classes, only 53 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed that students are encouraged to use their own ideas during pair and small group exercises. Sixty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that students fail to give opinions because the students fear being considered wrong. It is difficult, however, to conclude how the students feel as this study only investigated the instructors' opinions. If the instructors feel that it is difficult for the students to express themselves, then instructors may not give the students opportunities to offer personal input. In a communicative classroom, after instructions are given, the students should actively experiment and engage themselves in the language. The principle of encouraging students to express themselves is not universally implemented in Shimane.

Pair and Small Group Activities (7, 13, 23, 30, 31, 34, 35, 41; section 1 item 17)
In response to the item, *My speaking classes have pair and small group exercises,* 65 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed, while only four percent disagreed and seven percent gave a neutral response. Twenty-five percent responded with not applicable. Without further investigation, this discrepancy can not be explained. It is possible that the concept of pair and small group work is theoretically supported, but in reality, the activities are not being used because of physical circumstances, such as the size of the classroom or bolted down desks, that prevent free movement. It is also possible, however, that these activities are being done but

not clearly labeled as pair and small group activities. When other statements dealing with pair and small group activities are examined, this second hypothesis becomes more credible. In response to the related statements about pair and small group activities, not applicable was either not chosen or was only answered by one or two of the instructors. One would expect the same 25 percent to indicate not applicable to these items if pair and small group exercises are not being utilized. This is an issue for further study.

Even though the majority of the instructors utilize pair and small group exercises, there are also indications that pair work is not as effective as it can be. With 61 percent agreeing or remaining neutral, a majority of the instructors indicated that class time for pair and small group work is limited because the students do not use all of the time to practice the target language but rather regress into Japanese. Clearly, there are obstacles to the smooth use of pair and small group use, as discussed in the hindrances section.

Role-play (10)

Students often role-play in pairs or in small groups. When students role-play without a script, it can be a stimulating exercise for the learners. Because of the usefulness of role-play, it is unfortunate that more instructors do not utilize it more. The greatest number of instructors, 36 percent, indicated neutral, and seventeen percent indicated not applicable, presumably because they do not use role-play in class. The other instructors were evenly divided between agreement and disagreement. There is more indication that pair and small groups are being used, as seen in the previous section.

Authentic Materials (8)

Using authentic materials from the real world triggers and elicits responses and helps the students understand the practicality of the material. Eighty-two percent of the instructors indicated that they use authentic materials when appropriate. As one of the main elements of the Communicative Approach, this is a positive indication that elements of the approach are being used in Shimane.

Understanding the Target Language Culture (2, 39, 45)

An understanding of the target language's culture is important in learning a foreign language. Ninety-three percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed to this concept. Presumably, these instructors believe that teaching cultural points along

with the language is important. Sixty-eight percent of the instructors indicated that students' utterances may be misinterpreted by non-Japanese. But, only 47 percent agreed or strongly agreed that differences in culture inhibit the learning of second languages. It would seem, therefore, that 46 percent of the population believes that while an understanding of the foreign culture is important, cultural differences do not prevent the students from learning the language.

Pronunciation (3, 17)

When and how to correct pronunciation is always debatable. Even if the student's utterance is understandable, 32 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed, while 43 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, to correcting that pronunciation. Good pronunciation is important to being able to communicate. Before the gathering of the data, it was anticipated that the majority would agree with the item. However, nearly half of the instructors would not correct the pronunciation if the utterance is understandable. If learners are interrupted in the middle of an utterance or in the middle of an exchange, the natural flow of conversation is disrupted. If this occurs often, the joy of communication will be lost. When learners of a foreign language can make themselves understood in the target language, there is usually a sense of great accomplishment. This accomplishment gives learners the motivation to continue to try to improve communication.

Instructors' Understanding of the Communicative Approach (1, 16, 18, 29; section 1 items 13, 14, 16, 18, 20)

Eighty percent of the responding population and 79 percent of the SCL instructors strongly agreed or agreed to the statement, *Communicative competence is both linguistic knowledge and the skill in using this knowledge.* It is clear that instructors believe that in order to communicate, an individual must have not only a good understanding of grammar but also knowledge about when and how to use the grammar appropriate to the situation. However, only 57 percent of the instructors indicated that they understand the Communicative Approach. When asked how they learned about the Communicative Approach, the most frequent response was personal experience in the classroom. This may explain why two of the instructors indicated that they have never heard the term "Communicative Approach" before. Because formal instruction has not been done, it is possible that some instructors intrinsically use fundamentals of the Communicative Approach without terming them as such. Regardless of whether or not the instructors have a complete understanding of the approach, the fact remains that many of the instructors use

features of the Communicative Approach. Furthermore, when the instructors were asked what approach, both in theory and in reality, is best for teaching a speaking class, the Communicative Approach was chosen most frequently in both cases.

Summary: Aspects of the Communicative Approach

Most of the tenets of the Communicative Approach are supported. It is evident that the instructors believe that conveying meaning is an important goal in teaching English. Instructors who are facilitators help students actively use the target language to convey meaning, and only three instructors disagreed that their role is that of facilitator. Furthermore, only a few instructors indicated that their class is more teacher centered than student centered. Over half of the instructors are emphasizing not only grammar but also communicative competence through the use of pairs and small groups. Authentic materials are being used, and cultural aspects of the target language are viewed as important in the learning process. There may be a tendency by one-third of the instructors to over-emphasize pronunciation, but this is not directly preventing the Communicative Approach from being used.

Two features stand out as being underutilized. The first is role-play. The second involves who dominates classroom speaking. Less than half of the instructors have become facilitators who allow the students to speak more than they do. It is hoped that an understanding of some of the hindrances to the approach will enable the instructors to begin to use more role-play and to speak for less class time.

Analysis of Instructors' Hindrances

To determine some of the hindrances to the Communicative Approach, statements asking for the instructors' opinions were used. The frequency of the answers to items on the Likert scale was calculated on a percent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire appear in brackets after each subject heading. Unless the population is specified as the entire group of instructors, the analysis is based on the speaking/conversation and listening (SCL) instructors.

Emphasis on Grammar (21)

In response to the statement, *I hesitate to use the Communicative Approach because it does not allow enough time to study form/grammar,* only seven percent agreed while 57 percent of the instructors disagreed or strongly disagreed. Twenty-one percent were neutral, and 14 percent indicated not applicable. It is possible that because speaking, listening, reading, and writing are taught as individual subjects with grammar emphasized in the reading and writing courses, several instructors indicated not applicable or were neutral to the concept. Because "enough time" spent on grammar instruction is difficult to quantify, some instructors may have also chosen to answer neutrally or with not applicable. Overall, however, it can be concluded that grammar instruction is not a major restraint to the use of the Communicative Approach.

Oral Proficiency (22; section 1 item 2)

Only three of the non-native instructors agreed that *I hesitate to use the Communicative Approach in speaking classes because it asks me to be orally proficient in the target language.* Using self-evaluation, two of these same three instructors rated themselves as having an intermediate level of English, while the remaining instructor indicated an advanced ability. Even though these three individuals evaluated their speaking skills as adequate, they still feel their ability is not sufficient for teaching with the Communicative Approach. Among the other non-native, SCL instructors, one indicated native-like proficiency, four answered with highly advanced, five responded with advanced, five noted an upper-intermediate level, and one is at an intermediate level. This indicates that the Japanese instructors feel they have the ability to vocally use English, not just write the language. Oral proficiency is not, therefore, a hindrance to the Communicative Approach.

Textbooks (8, 24)

Forty-three percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed and 39 percent of the group was neutral to the statement, *Current textbooks facilitate communicative skills.* Since 82 percent indicated that they use authentic materials, one can conclude that the material is being used to supplement textbooks. Although the majority of the instructors do not have a strongly negative perception of textbooks, the fact that they are supplementing them indicates that the textbook publishers and writers could be providing more real-world activities, props, and/or conversations. Even so, the instructors have not indicated that the textbooks inhibit communicative skills or the use of the Communicative Approach.

Class Size (23, 25; section 1 item 12)

The instructors were asked the average class size, but rather than use a scale, they were asked to write in a number for more accuracy. Forty-three percent of the instructors in the speaking, conversation, and listening group indicated an average class size of 40 to 45 students. The next most common class size was 10 to 15 students in one class, as noted by 21 percent of the instructors. The third most common answer, given by 18 percent of the instructors, was 20 to 25 students. One instructor noted that the average class size was 50 students. A large number of classrooms have 40 or more students. Classrooms of this size make it difficult to give individual attention to students, but it is not impossible. It is conceivably easier to conduct a listening class with a large number of students if an adequate speaker system is used. In a conversation or speaking classroom with many students, it becomes more difficult to help the students with pronunciation, grammar, and meaning, while at the same time motivating the students to use English. The success of the communicative classroom depends on not only the instructor but also the students, and in classes of this size, this becomes even more important.

There is a gap between the native speakers' and the non-native speakers' responses. In most of the classrooms with native speakers of English, the most common class size was 15 students, with only two native-speaking instructors noting a class size of 30 or more students. Most speaking classes in Shimane are conducted by native speakers, but many listening classes are taught by non-native speakers. There is reason to believe that fundamentals of the Communicative Approach, such as pair and small group practice, are being given serious consideration when determining the number of students in each conversation class. In classes with fewer students, the students are given more time to interact with the instructor.

Class size is always a point of discussion in education, not just in teaching languages but also in other subjects. As this is the case, the instructors were asked to respond to the statement, *Speaking class sizes are too large.* Seventy-five percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed to the statement. Forty-three percent agreed that students stray from the target language in pairs and small groups, and large class sizes may help to explain why this is occurring. If the instructor does not have enough time with each student, the student may digress back into Japanese. In spite of the fact that native-speaking instructors generally have smaller classes, 78 percent agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. It is not clear whether these native instructors were referring to their class sizes specifically or to department class sizes in general. Although class size may be hindering the Communicative Approach in some cases, it is not a factor that is readily controlled by individual instructors.

Proficiency Tests (27)

Instruction does not seem to be dictated or influenced by national and international proficiency tests, such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Fifty percent of the instructors disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement, *I feel that what I teach is somewhat controlled by national and international proficiency tests.* Only 18 percent agreed or strongly agreed to the statement. For the instructors in Shimane, proficiency tests are not creating any conflict with instruction using the Communicative Approach.

Analysis of Students' Hindrances

Pair and Small Groups (7, 23, 30, 31, 41; section 1 item 17)

One of the main elements of the Communicative Approach is the use of pairs and small groups to practice naturally conversing in the target language, and 65 percent of the SCL instructors responded that they utilize this feature of the Communicative Approach. Forty-three percent agreed and 18 percent were neutral to the statement, *It is difficult to allow a great deal of time for pair and small group exercises because the students tend to not use the target language.* The Communicative Approach allows for some use of the L1, but excessive use of the L1 detracts from the approach. Some L1 may be needed to explain difficult points, but the Communicative Approach asserts that students should sometimes struggle in the L2 to promote learning. Since the students fall back to using Japanese and do not take full advantage of the time for English language production, consideration should be given to using activities that will engage the students. Grading participation, attendance, and attitude may also be effective. These things are being included in the determination of term grades by 57 percent, 46 percent, and 32 percent of the instructors, respectively.

Other explanations for why students revert back to Japanese were offered in the open response section at the end of the questionnaire. Three instructors indicated they have had slightly negative responses from the students about communicating with each other in English. One instructor indicated that the students only want to interact in English with the instructor and not with their fellow students. This instructor went on to note that the students feel that practicing with non-native speakers is a waste of time in the pursuit of improved listening and speaking skills. Another reason why the students revert back to Japanese may lie in the fact that the students have different skill levels, and some students may feel that practicing with students who have less developed skills is not productive.

Another questionnaire statement focused on whether it is difficult for most students to interact verbally in pairs in the target language. The results were evenly divided between instructors supporting and opposing the statement, with 43 percent and 46 percent, respectively. While some instructors find pair practice to be workable, others may have encountered students who do not use the practice time as effectively as possible. A third statement specified *it is difficult for most students to use the target language in small groups of about 5 people.* Forty-three percent again agreed or strongly agreed and 21 percent were neutral to the statement. These results may

indicate that some students needed an authoritative figure or leader, some incentive other than the one given in class, or more self-discipline or motivation in order to use the target language.

In response to the statement, *It is difficult for students to disclose semi-personal information to others who they have only been in class with for about half a term, about 8 weeks*, the instructors' opinions were fairly evenly divided. While thirty-six percent agreed and 36 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 25 percent remained neutral. The instructors should be aware that this problem can exist. Because the instructors who answered the questionnaire are teaching at several levels--junior college, nursing college, university, and medical university--these results are not surprising. One would expect a variance because of class sizes and relationships between classmates.

Almost half of the instructors feel that the students find it difficult to continually speak English in pairs and small groups, and as a result, these instructors must spend time and energy keeping the students on task, which detracts from the learning process. Based on this data, it would seem that limiting the time spent using small groups in interactive conversations could be helpful. This would not, however, be recommended because both pair practice and small group work are important features of the Communicative Approach and are believed to be effective techniques for teaching learners of a second language. The effectiveness of pair and small group work not only depends on the instructor but also on the students. There are a number of things an instructor can do to create a more comfortable atmosphere for the participants. The learners can be allowed to choose their own partners or groups. This may reduce the fear of making mistakes with new acquaintances. Material that the students find interesting should be used whenever possible. These findings are based on college students who are generally 17 to 22 years old. Those who teach English to mature students, that is to say, students who are older, may find that the students have more self-discipline to use the target language in small discussion groups without being monitored.

Embarrassment (7, 33, 34, 35, 38)

Two statements asked the instructors to evaluate whether they think the students are embarrassed to make mistakes with one other person and also in front of both small and large groups. Fifty percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed to the former statement, and 71 percent agreed or strongly agreed to the latter

statement. The instructors also indicated, with 72 percent agreement, that they feel that the students worry too much about making grammar mistakes and fail to try to convey meanings. This may be a cultural issue, since Japanese students are not asked to speak out in class during elementary, junior, and senior high school. As a result, they are unaccustomed to speaking in front of others and are easily embarrassed.

Students' use of body language and gestures in communication can be limited by embarrassment. Fifty-four percent of the instructors agreed that students have a difficult time using body language and gestures. This may be related to the social phenomenon of not wanting to stand out. Standing out takes confidence. If the students are not totally comfortable with their classmates or with speaking English, they may only be comfortable using, by Western standards, conservative gestures and body language. Additionally, gesturing in the Japanese culture seems to be impolite.

If students' embarrassment in making mistakes detracts from the ability to learn because it prevents the students from making utterances, the situation needs to be changed so that the students will participate in exercises. It is necessary to consider each student's ability when deciding lesson subjects. If students have the ability but are not expressing opinions, making original conversations, or participating in pair and small group work, consideration must be given as to whether the students are interested in, and therefore engaged in, the subject matter. In spite of the fact that the instructors feel students are embarrassed to make grammatical and/or pronunciation mistakes in small and large groups, 65 percent of the instructors clearly use pair and small group exercises. It would seem the instructors have found that the positive results from the use of pair and small groups outweigh the negatives. The instructors have, presumably, compensated for the embarrassment. In these cases, embarrassment does not limit the Communicative Approach, but it can be viewed as a hindrance in other cases. Further research needs to be done to determine how instructors can overcome embarrassment issues that may arise.

Expression of Opinions (36, 37, 40)

Two statements were constructed to determine whether the students resist giving their opinions in class. *Students are hesitant to give their own opinions in both the target language and in the Japanese language for fear of offending other students or the teacher* elicited 65 percent agreement/strong agreement and 18 percent

disagreement. The statement was changed from *offending others* to *for fear of being considered wrong,* and again, 65 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed and 18 percent disagreed. Both of these responses indicate that it can be difficult to have learners give their opinions. If the instructors are aware of this tendency, the instructors can begin to overcome the difficulties. The instructor may find it helpful to begin by having the students express opinions on basic topics and gradually train them to analyze and develop arguments. But, this may be nothing more than hopeful thinking since 61 percent of the instructors agreed or strongly agreed, while only 21 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, that *students have a difficult time being different from their peers in Japan.* In consideration of this point, before embarking on argumentative exercises, instructors may need to conduct an informal evaluation of the students to ascertain whether the students will be able to disagree with one another.

A comment made by a Japanese instructor in the final short answer section was that she thinks that many of the students simply do not have opinions. Although this is one instructor's opinion, it is something to think about. The lack of opinions could be linked to the education system or more broadly to a pop-culture phenomenon. In general, the students have not had much experience expressing their own opinions, even in the Japanese language. Japanese education in junior and senior high schools tends to emphasize the memorization of facts rather than the analyzing of them. If the problem exists even in the L1, it is not a barrier that can be easily overcome. The issue that Japanese students may be hesitant to express opinions or have no opinions is one that needs further investigation since a majority of the instructors indicated that it is a barrier to the Communicative Approach.

Students' Perceptions of Their Speaking Ability (42, 43)

Almost every instructor is challenged by the first year students' perceptions of their speaking ability. *Most students come to the first year of college with confidence in their target language speaking ability* elicited 92 percent disagreement/strong disagreement. This is a challenge not only for higher education instructors but also for junior and senior high school instructors. Delving a bit further, 50 percent of the instructors agreed and 32 percent were neutral to the premise that most first year students have more confidence in their L2 grammar than their L2 speaking ability. Giving students a sense of confidence in their speaking and listening skills may increase the amount of speaking in class. Without any confidence, the students'

attitudes toward communication will limit the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach.

Students Asking Questions (44; section 1 item 12)

In Western society, students are encouraged to ask questions as part of the learning process, which emphasizes active class participation. In contrast, this is not a dominant part of classroom activities in Japan. Seventy-five percent of the instructors indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement, *Students often ask questions without being asked if they have a question.* This can be partially attributed to class sizes that are too large. As previously noted, class sizes range from 15 to 50 students, and students may be reluctant to ask questions in large groups. It can also, however, be accounted for by the Japanese idiom, "The nail that sticks up will get hammered down." As one instructor noted in the short answer response, standing out, whether it be for positive or for negative reasons, is not encouraged in the Japanese education system, and in fact, in Japanese society. This is changing, but very slowly. By overcoming the challenge of creating a classroom atmosphere that encourages questions, two-way communication between the students and the instructor will be promoted. Until this is done, the Communicative Approach can not be fully effective.

Creating Conversations (32)

Fifty-seven percent of the instructors observed that the students may have difficulty using their imaginations to construct variations on studied conversations. Twenty-five percent of the instructors were neutral. When a conversation is only repeated a few times, it is not truly understood. By applying it, the students understand the real use of the language. The language becomes something personal rather than theoretical. At the present time, the students' inability to create new dialogues is a hindrance to the Communicative Approach.

Summary: Hindrances

As with any approach to teaching English as a foreign language, there are some aspects of the Communicative Approach that work well and some that do not function as well as they could. Most of the Japanese instructors of English feel they have adequate speaking ability. As this is the case, non-native speaking ability is not prohibiting the Communicative Approach. The instructors, as a whole, did not indicate that the Communicative Approach is limited by grammar instruction. Additionally, current textbooks and proficiency tests do not detract from the Communicative Approach. The instructors indicated that class sizes are too large, but there is no determination that large class sizes are directly inhibiting the approach. Smaller class sizes would be helpful, but barring that, the instructors' choices of activities appropriate to large groups are important.

The largest challenge the instructors seem to face is the students' reactions and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. The instructors help the students learn, but the students also play large roles in the classroom. The students need to accept an active role in order for the classroom experience to be meaningful. Almost half of the instructors agreed that it is difficult for the students to interact verbally in pairs and small groups. The instructors believe that the students are embarrassed to make mistakes. Furthermore, the approach and pair and small group work are limited because students either do not have opinions or are unwilling to express them for fear of offending others or for fear of being considered wrong. The instructors perceive the first year students to lack confidence in speaking English, which is another hindrance to pair work and to the Communicative Approach. Finally, the instructors noted that students do not actively participate in class by asking questions and by creating new dialogues. This passivity is limiting the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach. By helping students to overcome these problems, when possible, the instructors will increase the effectiveness of Communicative Approach-oriented classes. In addition, if anything that impedes learning can be avoided or circumvented, the learners will benefit. Although this study has uncovered several hindrances to the Communicative Approach, this list can never be all-inclusive.

Conclusion

This research addresses two issues. The first is how extensively the Communicative Approach is used in post-secondary institutions in the prefecture of Shimane, Japan, specifically in speaking and listening courses. On average, the instructors supported principles of the Communicative Approach 60 percent of the time. The median percentage support was also 60 percent. One individual positively responded to features of the Communicative Approach 80 percent of the time. While seven percent of the instructors disagreed to elements of the Communicative Approach more than 20 percent of the time, 43 percent of the instructors agreed to Communicative Approach tenets at least 70 percent of the time. Most of the elements of the Communicative Approach are being utilized by a majority of the instructors. Role-playing, however, needs to be implemented more often by more instructors. Furthermore, a minority of the instructors has not implemented a few of the tenets of the Communicative Approach, such as the use of pair and small group activities.

Secondly, the study discovers some of the hindrances to the use of the Communicative Approach in these institutions. The awareness of problems is the first step to improvement. Although the instructors are not limiting the approach, the instructors' perceptions of the students indicate that the students are hampering the effective use of the Communicative Approach. Of course, these students are not consciously attempting to do this. Unfortunately, several of these obstacles are based on cultural values, and they will be quite difficult to overcome. As motivation varies between students, the instructors must determine what motivates their students and use learning opportunities the students create. By doing so, the instructors can work to overcome obstacles, such as a lack of confidence and the fear of making mistakes, so that the students become more active participants in the learning process.

Different instructors have different experiences, and there is no definitive answer as to how to make the Communicative Approach more effective in every situation. Furthermore, as human beings, nothing can be 100 percent effective, and certainly not the application of communicative theories. In the open response section, five out of the nine comments made about students' reactions to the use of the Communicative Approach of teaching English were positive. One instructor indicated that the students enjoy communicative-style instruction, as opposed to reading or listening exercises that have comprehension checked at the end of the exercise. In four of the five positive responses, the instructors indicated that the

students initially had some difficulty with or resistance to the approach but finally adapted to communicating with classmates in English. Instructors may need to persevere for a period of time before the students accept the Communicative Approach, accepting the fact that their teaching will not be as smooth as might be desired. Perhaps more than anything else, adaptability to various groups of students is required to effectively use the Communicative Approach.

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Appendix

Please circle the appropriate response or fill in the blank, when necessary.
All references to a speaking class refer to a speaking/conversation class, and references to the target language refer to the second language you are teaching.

1. Is the second language that you are teaching your first language? Yes No
2. If the language that you teach is not your first language, what is your general speaking level?
   (A) native like (B) highly advanced (C) advanced (D) upper intermediate (E) intermediate
   (F) other _____ (G) native speaker
3. Highest degree earned. (A) Bachelors (B) Graduate certificate (C) Masters (D) Ph.D.
4. If you have studied overseas, please list the country, length of stay, and level of study.
   _____
5. Area of study in highest degree earned.
   (A)Education (B)TEFL (C)Applied Linguistics (D)Literature (E)other _____
6. Area of study in first degree earned. (A)Education (B)International studies (C)Business
   (D)Political Science (E)History (F)other _____
7. Level you most often teach at. (A) junior college (B) university or four year college
8. How many years have you been teaching at the post-secondary level?
   0-2 3-5 6-8 9-11 12 or more
9. How many years have you taught a second language?
   0-2 3-5 6-8 9-11 12 or more
10. Have you taught the target language at post-secondary institutions outside of Shimane? Yes No
11. What language do you teach?
    (A) English (B) German (C) French (D)Chinese (E)Korean (F)Other _____
12. What is your average class size? _____
13. In theory, the best approach for teaching a speaking class is
    (A)communicative (B)grammar-translation (C)audiolingual (D)situational
    (E)affective-humanistic (F)comprehension-based (G) eclectic (H)other _____
14. In reality, what approaches do you use, singularly or in combination, when teaching a speaking class? Please rank all appropriate approaches from most (1) to least used.
    (__)communicative (__)grammar-translation (__)audiolingual (__)situational
    (__)affective-humanistic (__)comprehension-based (__) eclectic (__)other _____
15. Circle the answers that best describe how you learned the approach(es) you are using.
    (A) seminars (B) a certificate course (C) Masters coursework (D) Doctorate coursework
    (E) professional journals (F) other teachers (G) personal experience in the classroom
16. If you use the communicative approach, circle the answer that best describes the process of how you learned this approach.
    (A)not applicable (B) a certificate course (C)Masters coursework (D)Doctorate coursework
    (E)professional journals (F) seminars (G) other teachers (H) personal experience in the classroom
17. How do you determine a student's grade for the term in speaking classes?
    (more than one answer is acceptable) (A) speaking test with the teacher (B) making a speech in front of class (C) multiple choice paper test (D) fill in the blank paper test (E) cloze tests
    (F) attitude (G) attendance (H) participation (I) translation test (J) other(s)_____

18. I feel that I understand the communicative approach?

(A) Yes (B) No

19. Do you teach or have you taught speaking/conversation or listening?

(A) Yes (B) No

20. Is this the first time you have heard of the term, "communicative approach"?

(A) Yes (B) No

Please circle your answer.

Please note that any reference to college also refers to junior college, when appropriate.

(A)Strongly agree (B)agree (C)neutral (D)disagree (E)strongly disagree (F)not applicable

1. Communicative competence is both linguistic knowledge and the skill in using this knowledge.

A B C D E F

2. An understanding of the target language's culture is essential to learning the language.

A B C D E F

3. Teaching grammar, pronunciation, and spelling alongside speaking is very important to being able to communicate. A B C D E F

4. Students should first cope with communicative tasks and then be given the grammatical form.

A B C D E F

5. My speaking classes focus <u>less</u> on form/grammar and <u>more</u> on meaning.

A B C D E F

6. My speaking classes focus mostly on form/grammar.

A B C D E F

7. My speaking classes have pair and small group exercises.

A B C D E F

8. I use authentic materials from the real world in class when appropriate.

A B C D E F

9. Over 50% of class time is used in some kind of communicative activity.

A B C D E F

10. Role-play is utilized a great deal in my classes.

A B C D E F

11. The students have more speaking time in class than I do.

A B C D E F

12. Students are encouraged to use their own ideas to make conversations or change conversations in pair and small group exercises. A B C D E F

13. My classes are more student-centered than teacher-centered.

A B C D E F

14. One of my main purposes or roles in class is to be a facilitator.

A B C D E F

15. My classes repeat phrases for a large part of the class period.

A B C D E F

16. In my reactions with students I correct their form/grammar more than 50% of the time.

A B C D E F

17. I try to always correct my students' pronunciations, even if they can still be understood.

A B C D E F

18. It is acceptable, at times, for the students to make form/grammar mistakes in the pursuit of conveying meaning. A B C D E F

19. I encourage students to convey meanings without penalty, even if they use incorrect form/grammar.

A B C D E F

20. I encourage students to strive for correct form/grammar.

A B C D E F

21. I hesitate to use the communicative approach because it does not allow enough time to study form/grammar. A B C D E F

22. I hesitate to use the communicative approach in speaking classes because it asks me to be orally proficient in the target language. A B C D E F

23. It is difficult to allow a great deal of time for pair and small group exercises because the students tend to not use the target language. A B C D E F

24. Current textbooks facilitate communicative skills. A B C D E F

25. Speaking class sizes are too large. A B C D E F

26. I feel that what I teach is somewhat controlled by national and international proficiency tests.

A B C D E F

27. University entrance exams help students develop their second language speaking ability.

A B C D E F

28. Because grammar is highly emphasized, the entrance exams positively affected the way students were taught a second language in high school. A B C D E F

29. In order to teach more effectively, I have had to adjust the approach that I studied.

A B C D E F

30. It is difficult for most students to use the target language in small groups of about 5 people.

A B C D E F

31. It is difficult for most students to interact verbally in pairs in the target language.

A B C D E F

32. Students have a difficult time using their imaginations to construct variations on studied conversations. A B C D E F

33. Students have a difficult time using body language and gestures to communicate.

A B C D E F

34. I feel that students are embarrassed to make grammatical and/or pronunciation mistakes when using the target language with one other person. A B C D E F

35. I feel that students are embarrassed to make grammatical and/or pronunciation mistakes in front of groups, both small and large. A B C D E F

36. Students are hesitant to give their own opinions in both the target language and in the Japanese language for fear of offending other students or the teacher.

A B C D E F

37. Students are hesitant to give their own opinions in both the target language and in the Japanese language for fear of being considered wrong. A B C D E F

38. I feel that students worry too much about their form/grammar and fail to try to convey meanings. A B C D E F

39. I feel that Japanese students have a difficult time learning second languages because of the differences in culture. A B C D E F

40. I feel that students have a difficult time being different from their peers in Japan. A B C D E F

41. It is difficult for students to disclose semi-personal information to others who they have only been in class with for about half a term, about 8 weeks. [For example, what they did on the weekend.] A B C D E F

42. Most students come to the first year of college with confidence in their target language speaking ability. A B C D E F

43. Most students come to the first year of college with more confidence in their target language grammar than in their speaking ability. A B C D E F

44. Students often ask questions without being asked if they have a question. A B C D E F

45. At times, students' intended meanings or their definitions of words/phrases could be interpreted differently by someone with a non-Japanese point of view. A B C D E F

46. For non-Japanese teachers only: I have found that I have had to adapt my teaching methods to the Japanese culture. A B C D E F

47. For non-Japanese teachers only: I have had to change my style of teaching because the Japanese students are more accustom to lecture style instruction. A B C D E F

For record keeping purposes only:

Name _____ Institution _____

***The next short answer question is optional.**

Short answer. Please give a two to four sentence answer, when appropriate.

If you have had adverse reactions from students and/or other instructors to the use of the communicative approach, what types of reactions have you encountered? In your opinion, why did they react this way?

_____

_____

_____

_____

I genuinely thank you for your time.

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