

論文

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

Jack Ryan

要 旨

大学一年生必修科目の英会話授業を担当しています。この授業は学生のモチベーションが永遠の課題です。どうすればモチベーションをあげられるかずっと研究しています。いかにして『教え方』、『教授法』、『教授細目』、『シラバス』、『アクティビティ』の要素を組み合わせれば良い授業、または良いコースになるかをこの論文にはこれらの要素を組み合わせることでコースの枠組みを提案します。会話授業を成功するために楽しく、リラックスできる、和気あいあいとした教室の雰囲気の高さも強調します。それでいて、楽しく、モチベーションをあげる授業のほとんど毎回使えるアクティビティのいくつかを提供します。授業が楽しければ楽しいだけ学生のモチベーションをあげることができ、必死に参加してくれれば英会話力につなげることもできるでしょう。

Keywords : motivation (モチベーション), intrinsic motivation (本質的なモチベーション), extrinsic motivation (非本質的なモチベーション), conversation (会話), activities (アクティビティ/授業活動), information gap (インフォメーションギャップ/情報交換するプリント/穴埋めをするプリント), syllabus (シラバス), topics (テーマ/課題), content (授業内容)

In this paper I will outline a simple and hopefully useful process to utilize to help a teacher design a motivational English conversational unit. I will explain how to develop a unit based on largely student self-selected themes and topics and how to design activities around the respective themes.

Background

In my current teaching context I am responsible for teaching required English conversation classes to first-year university students. Most of my students have had at least three and most likely up to six years of required English classes. Personal experience and anecdotal evidence indicates that most of those classes have been conducted predominantly in Japanese by a Japanese teacher. Grammar-translation methodology with explicit grammatical explanations and sentence translations seem to have been commonly recurring topics in class. Explicit or implicit goals of instruction were to facilitate the students ability to pass entrance exams for high school or university. This is despite the fact that, in 2003 the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (hereinafter MEXT) issued the following guidelines:

“On graduation from a senior high school, students can conduct normal communication with regard to topics relating to daily life.”

I mention this goal only because, as a university teacher teaching first year students, it is relevant for me to know what competencies my students should be entering my classes with. While the goal is rather vague and provides great latitude for individual schools and teachers to interpret it as they see fit, in my experience, the senior high school goal is not being reached. Despite the reference to the ability to “conduct normal communication” it seems likely this goal is being largely ignored in favor of using English class time preparing students for entrance exams. Inevitably, preparation for discrete item written tests means more time spent on grammatical explanations, question types and test-taking strategies all of which can be most efficiently conducted in Japanese by most Japanese English teachers.

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

As such, after completing years of required and often unexciting English study in primary and secondary school, often for the purposes of passing an exam at some time in the future, many of my students are looking forward to leaving English and foreign language study behind completely or moving on to other languages in university. Therefore, motivation is often quite low in my required English conversation class for first year students. Motivation is an important issue for me as I enjoy teaching, would like my students to enjoy and benefit from their experience in my classes, and try to always provide quality instruction for all my students. I am constantly working to refine my methodology, improve my classroom techniques and activities and provide pedagogically sound, fun and appropriate classroom activities for my students.

Teaching Philosophy

In my English conversation classes I teach English as a vehicle for communication, to realize social interaction and to transmit and receive information. Another ancillary goal is to promote an enjoyment of using English to communicate. One simple way to promote enjoyment and therefore hopefully increase motivation, of speaking English is to adapt teaching materials to reflect student interests. Communicative language learning theory holds that activities that involve real communication promote learning. Activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning and language that is meaningful to the student supports the learning process.

In my context of teaching required courses to first-year university students I would describe the majority of students as extrinsically motivated in that they participate in class and complete activities, even if they have little interest in the material, because they anticipate receiving a reward for their efforts in the form of a passing grade. There certainly are some students with intrinsic motivation. This can be described as a motivation to participate in activities without expecting any reward or external benefit but simply for enjoyment. One of my goals as a teacher is to promote the development of intrinsic motivation because research has shown that intrinsically motivated students have increased long-range interest in a topic. Factors that

promote intrinsic motivation include:

Challenging but achievable activities

Curiosity (something students are interested in)

Control (the ability to have some degree of control over the environment; something that is inherently difficult in a foreign language classroom with a teacher who is a foreigner and a native-speaker of the target language)

Competition (the ability to compare their performance with classmates)

Cooperation (helping others to achieve their goals)

Recognition (having their accomplishments recognized)

While I may often have few intrinsically motivated students at the university level, I have the luxury in my conversational classes of not being constrained by a need to prepare my students for entrance exams. This means that there is nothing to hold me back from experimenting and trying to achieve my goals and promote intrinsic motivation by practicing my beliefs. The techniques and activities I use are designed to promote all of the above mentioned factors said to encourage intrinsic motivation. I know from my own ongoing experiences studying Japanese and other languages that I am more motivated when I am studying material that I have an interest in. Why should it be any different for my students? Similarly, in my experience, very few students want to learn a foreign language simply as an academic exercise or to be able to read Shakespeare in the original English (although there very likely are people with this sort of motivation). Most of us, myself included, want to learn languages to be able to communicate with native speakers of that language.

Classroom Environment

Most language teachers readily acknowledge that affective factors are an important element in creating the optimum language learning environment. Even so, it seems to me that many teachers do not spend enough time working to create a positive affective environment in their classrooms. Based on my own experience studying Japanese and other languages, I still agree with what Stephen Krashen said so many years ago when he noted that learners need to have a “low affective filter” for language acquisition to take place. Conditions for learning should be positive and the atmosphere must be low-anxiety and non-threatening to the students for learning

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

to take place. A non-threatening, low-anxiety atmosphere should be created in which students can make language attempts without fear of excessive embarrassment or shame. If those students are simultaneously motivated and (hopefully) confident we are close to optimum conditions for language learning to take place. Before even mentioning syllabi, units, topics, techniques and activities this is the classroom environment I strive to create from which everything follows. In my classroom, creating a positive affective environment includes playing soft background music at a low volume to help relax students and to help minimize any awkward silences that may occur. I also make it a point to try to single out for praise students making a real effort in class regardless of whether they are the best English speakers in class or not. As for error correction, rather than singling out individual students in front of the entire class I will point out mistakes by pulling students aside or by choosing a common mistake and illustrating it on the whiteboard. Another thing I do that may seem trite to some is to show an interest in students lives and Japanese pop culture by chatting with them before and after class. Students always seem happy to talk about their hobbies, clubs, part-time jobs, sports, pop stars and movie stars among other things. Rather than hearing a foreign teacher talk to them about David Beckham or Brad Pitt they are pleased to know that their teacher knows and can chat about the latest Japanese pop, movie and sports stars. In my opinion, this helps create a bond with students and can reassure them that their teacher is interested in their lives and culture and is not solely interested in implicitly imposing a cultural imperialism on them. If students feel that a teacher really wants to help them learn and succeed it can only result in a positive effect on the classroom environment. The attitude students have towards the teacher, the material and the learning environment all affect their level of anxiety and hence their ability to perform in the classroom.

Unit Composition

For the sake of simplicity I have separated the parts of my unit. The two main elements of my unit are fixed elements and content. The fixed elements refer to the types of activities and teaching techniques which stay relatively constant. Content refers to the topics and themes and are largely suggested or dictated by student input and feedback. The fixed elements are the types of activities used in class which

include dialogue drills, substitution drills, information gap activities, running dictations, ordering strip stories and role-plays. The content would usually be a general topic like “Eating out” or “Part-time jobs” or “Family” etc.

Fixed Unit Elements

Earlier I mentioned dialogue drills and substitution drills, which are not considered to be communicative activities, among activity types I often use in class. Even so, I like to use them as pre-communicative activities in my lower-level conversation classes for a few reasons. It seems advisable to give students the opportunity for controlled practice of any language they will be expected to produce in communicative activities. This will allow them to focus on the language form without having to worry about offering input or communicating a message. They can also serve to increase their confidence and prepare them to succeed in a communicative activity. This is particularly important in my view as anecdotal evidence suggests many Japanese students of English have a negative, defeatist attitude towards English due to previous unsuccessful experiences studying the language. The failure to adequately prepare our students to succeed on in-class conversational activities is one of the most egregious mistakes we can make.

Examples of pre-communicative activities I commonly use include dialogue read and repeat and substitution drills. For example, I might give the students a handout with a dialogue between two people and they would repeat chorally after me. Alternatively I might conduct a substitution drill based on the handout by substituting a name or some other information from the dialogue and again having student repeat. For instance, I might give the students an information gap handout about part-time jobs (Appendix 2). There are two handouts, an A version and a B version, and half the class will get each version. The handout has four names and five questions about part-time jobs. Before beginning the activity I will have the students chorally repeat the questions. Then I will confirm understanding by asking questions about the information on the handout. Next, I might substitute names and ask various questions and solicit answers from students. For example, I may ask “Where does Shinobu work?” and any student with handout B should be able to answer correctly

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

that she works at a cafe. Then I may ask “Does Asami like her job?” and any student with handout A should be able to answer that, “Yes, she loves her job.”

After completing a pre-communicative activity and confirming that students know what is expected of them and what the objective of the activity is it is time to move into a more communicative activity. Using the example of the part-time job information gap, I would ensure that students know that their initial task is to complete the empty half of their handout by asking classmates questions. Once this is complete we would reconvene as a whole class and I would visually confirm that everyone has completed the task by checking to see that they have filled in all the empty spaces on the handout. Then I would proceed to ask the whole-class questions about the information on the handout. The next step moving toward more natural communication is to have students write their own answers to the five questions under the “You” column. We would then chorally practice the handout questions to ensure that students are comfortable with the language form changes. For example, the form will change when we ask directly rather than using the third person form (i. e. “Where does Ryuta work?” becomes “Where do you work?”). Immediately following that the students must find two classmates to ask all five questions and record their answers in the Partner 1 and Partner 2 columns. After this is complete we will again reconvene and I will ask questions about class members. For example, if there are students called Nao and Masaya in the class I may ask questions like “Where does Nao work?” or “Does Masaya ever go out with his co-workers?” I will be sure to also randomly ask students directly “Where do you work (Tomomi)?”, “Do you like your job (Naoki)?”, “How many days a week do you work (Kaori)?”, “How much do you make per hour (Yasu)?” and “Do you ever go out with your co-workers (Ayumi)?” The next stage is to have students ask classmates the five questions from the handout without writing down their answers. I direct students to take their handouts and find two classmates they have not spoken to yet and ask each other the questions. By now they have had a considerable amount of practice and should have memorized the questions. The final activity requires the teacher to collect the handouts from the students and then have them find two more new partners to practice speaking with. Obviously as they have no handout at this stage they are not required to write anything down. The point is for them to have as

natural and communicative a conversation in English as possible. This is a very common activity I use in most of my required English conversation classes. Information gap activities work quite well in moving from controlled practice to reaching a communicative objective because the students can see on the handouts themselves what questions they must ask their classmates and what information they must gather to complete the task. The ultimate goal is to wean students completely away from the handout and have them speaking fluently in English about something they are interested in. As such, all the above procedures are in place to move from controlled practice to freer practice and ultimately leading to my collecting the handouts and students speaking freely on the assigned topic (or any topic) without relying on or referring to any handout or notes.

Selecting Content

The most important single factor in making this unit motivational is the content selection. Well-planned lessons with fun and creative activities often fail to inspire students if they are not interested in the material being presented to them. I want to be confident that the material I present in my classes is what students want to study. To do that I use a variety of techniques to select content including input and feedback from informal student interviews, a questionnaire and classroom observation. One other thing I often do that may seem almost naive and counterintuitive is to simply ask students what they want to study in class. Occasionally the answers are vague and unhelpful but oftentimes they are very frank and helpful and sometimes even quite thoughtful. Some students seem taken aback by being asked what they want to study by a teacher. Perhaps it seems to them an implicit violation of the typical teacher-student relationship in which the teacher dictates material and the student is a completely passive recipient. However, even if nothing beneficial comes from their comments or suggestions, I believe that the very act of asking students their opinions about course content can serve to motivate them. Making students feel that they have a stake in the course and that their opinions are being sought out and considered shows that they are valued and respected. I also use an unscientific questionnaire (Appendix 1) that I give to students

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

on the first day of class to help me decide on content for the semester. The questionnaire has a list of topics that I ask students to rank in the order in which they would like to study those topics. It also has a number of questions about activity types and class groupings. I consider the answers to these questions in determining which types of activities to present in class. Finally, I use classroom observation over the first few weeks of class to see if overt student enthusiasm and motivation changes as tasks and activities change. For example, if an explanation of the ordering of a strip-conversation activity elicits a roomful of groans or rolled eyes I can probably safely presume that students in that particular class may not enjoy that type of activity. On the other hand, if an explanation of a running dictation elicits a class full of smiles and “tanoshii” comments I can probably safely presume that this class enjoys that type of activity.

Alternative Activities and Unit Topics

Let’s say that the sum total of my data collection efforts have shown me that my students want to study the following topics in the following order: Sports, Music, Part-time jobs, Hobbies, Movies, Travel and Family. I determine the order based on a combination of oral feedback and the numbered answers to the list of possible unit topics on my questionnaire (Appendix 1). The activity types have largely been pre-selected (including dialogue drills, substitution drills, information gap activities, running dictations, ordering strip stories and role-plays etc.) and the unit themes have now been selected. Now, the teacher is responsible for simply plugging in relevant content for each theme into each or a number of activity types. The previously discussed information gap activity (Appendix 2) is a good example of an activity for the unit on Part-time jobs. Appendixes 3 and 4 show examples of how a running dictation can be created around the topic of Part-time jobs. The handout Appendix 3 is affixed to a wall outside the classroom and the members the previously grouped four or five groups takes turns going outside and reading and memorizing one sentence and reporting it to a classmate who records it on a blank sheet of paper. The same pattern applies to the handout Appendix 4 which is a list of questions the groups will answer together when they have completed the dictation. Another

example of an activity might be to have groups of students order a strip conversation talking about Part-time jobs (Appendix 5). The procedure I use to present strip conversations to my students is to make and laminate enough copies for each group to have one copy of the conversation. Then, the teacher should cut up each laminated copy and present one copy each to every group for them to cooperatively put in the correct order. This is a fun competitive activity as the group compete with each other to be the first to get the conversation in the correct order. When all groups have finished we read chorally and then I often have students practice the conversation as is with a partner. Next, I have them personalize it by replacing the information on the handout with their own part-time job information where applicable (i. e. “I work at a supermarket” might become “I work at a cafe” depending on the student’s actual; part-time job etc.).

Conclusion

Using the unit theme of part-time jobs as an example, I have demonstrated an extended information gap, a running dictation and a strip conversation activity. These are just some of the activity types that can be productively used to help promote active participation and encourage intrinsic motivation in the English conversation classroom. The activities are designed to be challenging but achievable, have content students are curious about, allow for a certain degree of control by using information gap handouts with clear finite tasks, promote competition by seeing who can complete the activities (information gap, running dictation etc.) accurately the quickest, encourage cooperation both as pairs and groups and allow for recognition as I always acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of the hardest-working students.

Filling lessons with fun, well-thought out communicative activities with content students want to study seems a sure-fire way to promote intrinsic motivation. As such, any teacher who wants to have intrinsically motivated students in their classroom should be willing to spend the time necessary to collect data on what their students want to learn. After all, presumably we are in this profession because we enjoy teaching and it should be in both our students and our interests to provide them with the best and most motivating instruction as possible.

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

Bibliography

- Bantjes, Leon. "Motivation in the Classroom." *Engines for Education*. 1994. The Institute for the Learning Sciences, Northwestern University
- Krashen, Stephen D., *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Prentice-Hall International, 1987
- Krashen, Stephen D., *Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*. Prentice-Hall International, 1988
- Lepper, M. R., & Hodell, M. (1989). Intrinsic motivation in the classroom. In C. Ames & R. Ames (Eds.), *Research on motivation in education* (Vol. 3, p.73–105). San Diego: Academic Press
- Lightbown, Patsy M. & Brown, Nina *How Languages Are Learned*. Oxford University Press, 2006
- Malone, T. W., & Lepper, M. R. (1987). Making Learning Fun: A Taxonomy of Intrinsic Motivations for Learning. In R. E. Snow & M. J. Farr (Eds.), *Aptitude, Learning and Instruction: III. Conative and affective process analyses* (pp. 223–253). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003 publication
- Nunan, David Editor, *Practical English Language Teaching*, McGraw Hill, 2003
- Richards, Jack, *The Language Teaching Matrix*. Cambridge University Press, 1990

Appendix 1

Pre-course Survey

1. Rank the following topics based on how much you would like to study them in this class?

以下のテーマはこの授業で勉強したい順位でランクして下さい。最も勉強したい事1最も勉強したくない事8をお願いします。勉強したい事書いてなければ以下の線に書いて下さい。

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Travel/ 旅行 | _____ |
| Singers/Movie stars 歌手／俳優／女優 | _____ |
| Family 家族 | _____ |
| Hobbies 趣味 | _____ |
| Economics & Politics 政治経済 | _____ |
| Movies 映画 | _____ |
| Eating out / 外食 | _____ |
| Sports スポーツ | _____ |
| Part-time jobs アルバイト | _____ |
| School life 大学／大学生生活 | _____ |
| Music 音楽 | _____ |
| Clubs 部活 | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ |

2. How do you feel about doing the following classroom activities in this class?

クラス内での以下の内容(アクティビティ) 授業でやりたいですか?

1) Information Gap activities

(A と B のプリントを使って、お互いに情報交換をすること)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

2) Dictation

(一人が教室の外の掲示板の文を読みに行きその内容を暗記し、もう一人に伝え、それを紙に書く)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

3) Textbook (この授業で教科書を使いたいのですか?)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

4) Songs (曲を聞いて歌詞を埋める)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

5) Putting conversations in correct order

(会話文の単語を並べ替えて、正しい順番に入れること)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

6) Concentration game (神経衰弱ゲーム)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

8. How do you feel about the following classroom configurations?

授業を受ける時の配置について、以下のやり方についてどう思いますか?

1) Whole class work (クラス全体で講義を受ける)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

2) Small group work (4～6人のグループで練習する)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

3) Pair work (2人ペアになって会話練習などをする)

| | | | | |
|----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Not interested | | | | Very interested |
| 楽しくなさそう | | | | 楽しそう |

9. Comments

(率直な意見を聞かせて下さい。この授業で勉強したい事教えて下さい。思うこと何でもオッケーです。先生に参考になります。)

Appendix 2

| A | Kenji | Shinobu | Ryuta | Asami | You | Partner 1 | Partner 2 |
|---|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| Where does ___ work? | at an izakaya | | at Shidax Karaoke | | | | |
| Does ___ like his/her job? | | No, she doesn't | | Yes, she loves it. | | | |
| How many days a week does ___ work? | 3 or 4 days a week | | Every week is different | | | | |
| How much does ___ make per hour? | | 800 yen per hour | | She makes 1500 yen per hour | | | |
| Does ___ ever go out with his/her co-workers? | sometimes | | No, he doesn't like his co-workers | | | | |

| B | Kenji | Shinobu | Ryuta | Asami | You | Partner 1 | Partner 2 |
|---|---------------------------|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| Where does ___ work? | | She works at a cafe | | She works at a cram school | | | |
| Does ___ like his/her job? | Yes, he does. | | No, he doesn't like it. | | | | |
| How many days a week does ___ work? | | She works Saturday and Sunday | | Every weeknight | | | |
| How much does ___ make per hour? | he makes 900 yen per hour | | He makes 750 yen per hour | | | | |
| Does ___ ever go out with his/her co-workers? | | Yes, because her boyfriend also works there. | | No, she never does. | | | |

Appendix 3

A

Tom is nineteen years old.

He works at a family restaurant called Royal Host.

He works five days a week.

Tom makes 900 yen per hour.

His main job is to be a waiter.

Another one of his jobs is to keep the restaurant clean.

He likes his job because there are many cute girls at his restaurant.

He usually works in the afternoon and evenings.

Tom has been working at Royal Host for about six months.

Appendix 4

B

How long has Tom been working at his part-time job?

When does he usually work?

How many days a week does Tom work?

Where does Tom work?

Does he like his job?

How old is Tom?

Why does Tom like his job?

How much does Tom make per hour?

What is Tom's main job?

What is another one of Tom's jobs at the restaurant?

Designing a Motivational Conversational Unit

Appendix 5

Hi, how's it going?

Great, how about you?

I'm really tired. I've been so busy with my part-time job.

Oh, really? You have a part-time job?

Yeah. I work at an izakaya. How about you?

I work at a supermarket. Do you like your job?

Yeah, it's pretty good. What about you?

It's okay. How often do you work?

I work five nights a week. How about you?

I work Saturdays and Sundays. Do you like your boss?

Yeah, he's pretty nice. And you?

No, my boss is mean. How much do you make per hour?

I make 900 yen per hour? What about you?

I make 850 yen an hour. Do you ever go out with your co-workers?

Sometimes. How about you?

No, never. Do you get a discount on food?

Yes. It's great. What about you?

Yeah. me too. Well, I've got to go. nice talking to you.

You too.