

A Case Study of Spanish Teaching at Washington and Lee University in the U.S. and Rikkyo University in Japan and Its Implications on Japan's English Education*

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I. Purpose

With the advent of globalization, people who speak different languages are required to communicate with one another more than ever before. Although English comes second in terms of the number of speakers (Huntington 60), the language has established itself as the most widely used common language in the international arena (Crystal 1). As an island country, Japan is not excluded from the wave of globalization, and her people feel the need to acquire foreign languages, especially the English language, to communicate with people with various backgrounds. The proposal to make English the official language of Japan dates back to as late as the Meiji period (Moteki 23) and now is being supported by some people, who believe according an official status to the language will allow the country to remain economically and politically strong in the internationalized world (see Funabashi, for example). The majority of Japanese junior and senior high schools and universities have taught English to their students, believing that a good command of English will guarantee the students economic success and possibly, a better future.

From the year 2002, even elementary schools will introduce English classes from the third grade (Moteki 5-6).

The time and effort that our nation has put in acquiring the foreign language seems to have paid off to some extent. According to 日本経済新聞 (*Japan Economic Newspaper*), the Japanese average score in the TOEFL test was 498 out of 677 (Ohtani 28). The score is the lowest among 25 Asian countries, and many have quoted the score as evidence for Japanese people's low proficiency in English (cf. Ohtani 28, Moteki 10-11, Takashima 1, Imabayashi 7). However, I do not believe that the nation's low TOEFL score reflects its poor English ability for three reasons. First, the countries with high scores, such as Singapore with 603, India with 581, the Philippines with 577 and so on, were once colonized by Britain or America, and the English language has been given the status of official or quasi-official language in these countries. It is no wonder that Japanese people score lower than people in these countries because Japanese people use English much less often than they do. Second, since the nation is economically strong, taking the TOEFL test is much more common in Japan than in other Asian neighbors. Since it costs \$ 110 to take the test, only people who want to study at universities in English speaking countries take the test in most countries. It stands to reason that the Japanese people's average score is lower than those of other countries, where the English elites account for most of the test takers. Third, as the lowest it is among the 25 Asian countries surveyed, Japan's average score, 498, does not indicate a lack of English ability. According to Yoshinari Nagamoto, the principal of an English school specializing in the TOEFL and TOEIC tests, most American and Canadian universities consider 500 to be acceptable scores for prospective international students (14). We can say that English education in Japan has achieved relative success considering that its people get about 500, an acceptable score for most American and Canadian universities, on the TOEFL test even though most Japanese people do not use English on a daily basis and that people with various English proficiency levels take the test in our country.

However, there has been a criticism that Japanese people are relatively not good at speaking or listening to English and hence, cannot communicate effectively in the language (Moteki 9). Atsuko Takashima, a professor of linguistics and English education at Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College, attributes Japanese

people's inability to communicate in the language to the history of the nation: in the Meiji era, Japan was lagging behind many European countries because of her isolation policy enforced in the Edo period. After she decided to abandon the policy, her people started to learn foreign languages so that they could understand books from more advanced countries to absorb knowledge or technology, because of which in learning a foreign language, Japanese people have put emphasis on comprehension rather than communication (Takashima 9-11).

As more and more Japanese people came into contact with people from other countries though, they started to realize the need to communicate with them and feel that the main objective of language education should be teaching students to communicate. For example, an official note issued by 文部次官 (*Mombu-jikan* = the Vice-Minister of Education) on October 6 in 1977 reflected the shift in people's expectations for language teaching. The note emphasizes the need to instill abilities to express themselves in students through foreign language education (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, "What" 56). "文部省指導要領 (*Mombu Shido Youryo* = The Education Guidelines)" revised in 1999 emphasize the need to teach communicative skills as well and describe the objective of foreign language education as "積極的にコミュニケーションを図ろうとする態度の育成を図り、情報や相手の意向などを理解したり自分の考えなどを表現したりする実践的コミュニケーション能力を養う (fostering the students' attitudes to communicate in a foreign language actively, and providing students with practical communicative skills necessary for comprehending information or the other parties' intention and expressing their own opinions)"¹ ("Education").

More than 20 years have passed since Japanese people first realized the importance of teaching communicative skills through foreign language education, and we still believe the importance of it, but the nation does not seem to have made much progress in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Takashima, Imabayashi, and 東北産業活性化センター (*Tohoku Sangyo Kasseika Center* = the Center for Reinvigorating Industries in Tohoku District), for instance, point out that despite the six to ten years they spend studying English, most Japanese people cannot communicate effectively in the language. There are many possible explanations for Japanese people's lack of English communicative skills. For example, Imabayashi writes that Japanese people do not start learning the language

early enough and insists that we should start teaching it while we are still kindergarten or elementary school students (17-23). Takashima attributes the nation's low English proficiency to two reasons: the lack of chances to use the language in our daily life and our unwillingness to discuss with others even in our mother tongue (11-19). According to Yukio Takefuta, a professor of linguistics and phonology at Chiba University, other possible reasons are: not enough class hours for English at school, too many student in a class, too much emphasis on the Grammar-translation, unpractical English entrance exams for colleges, lack of English competence of English teachers, shame associated with making mistakes in Japanese culture, linguistic differences between Japanese and English, Japan's history of not being colonized by English-speaking countries, and so on (24-26). Many explanations are suggested but the underlying cause has yet to be discovered.

In accordance with people's growing interest in teaching communicative skills in foreign languages, CLT started to get attention from many people. According to Sadao Takahashi, the concept of CLT was first introduced in the 70's, and had been established as a field of study in the 80's (258-259). In order to find out how communicative skills can be taught, many researches and practices of CLT have been conducted in Japan (Sadao Takahashi 259). For example, Suwa (1994) observes introductory English classes at three elementary schools and analyzes them based on Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT), an observation scheme which developed from CLT (see Spada 1995 for details). Suwa finds differences among the schools in such areas as methods, materials, and amount of Japanese and English used during classes and discusses how the numbers, mother tongues, and English proficiency of the instructors cause the differences. She also finds out that the English courses at each school lack clear goals and such areas as teacher-training and team-teaching should be improved (195). 新潟県コミュニカティブ・ティーチング研究会 (*Niigata Communicative Teaching Kyokai* = Niigata Association of Communicative Teaching) (1978-1981), which observes and describes English classes at junior and senior high schools in Niigata over three years, is another example of studies of actual CLT practices in Japan and considered to be one of the biggest projects ever done on the subject (Sadao Takahashi 259). The study emphasizes the importance of instructors' English abilities and willingness to communicate in English, pattern

practices using drills, and environments where the students can engage in personal and meaningful communications. The study also introduces many concrete examples of communication-oriented junior and senior high school classes and is very significant because it suggests that CLT is possible even at the elementary level (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, "Characteristics" 88). Kitazawa (1997) describes English communicative classes at a Japanese university and argues the importance of creating a relaxing learning environment where the students can enjoy communicating without any anxiety. He also advises the instructors to encourage the students to express themselves without being afraid of making mistakes (248-261).

There seem to be some criticisms against the Communicative Approach. For example, in "Language, Literature, and Education," a round-table discussion which concluded JACET (=Japanese Association of College English Teachers) Kyoto Seminar 2001, Professor Akifumi Saito at Tokyo University says that he prefers the Grammar-translation to the Communicative Approach because according to him, language and literature are inseparable from each other, and they have to be taught in pairs.² He expresses his worry that language education in Japan is now moving away from close analysis of language and texts towards more practical oral communication. According to him, the Communicative Approach, which does not involve close reading of texts, may enable students to carry on simple, every-day conversation, but it has not taught them to read or talk about complex and sophisticated issues very successfully in Japan. Ms. Hyde, another participant of the discussion, however, argues that the Communicative Approach itself is not entirely flawed. According to her, if CLT results in the ability to carry out only low-level communication, that is because the contents the instructors teach are low-level; the Communicative Approach can teach students to engage in intellectual conversation, and the methodology itself is not to blame. The belief about CLT resulting in low communicative competence expressed by Professor Saito seems to have been around for long. Sano et. al, who have conducted a well-known project on CLT (Sadao Takahashi 259), makes it clear that "CTは、このようにして、決して片言英語を奨励するのが狙いでもないし、口先だけでペラペラことばを操る人間を育成しようとするものでもない (CLT does not encourage the students to get their messages across at the cost of accuracy nor does

it try to create those who are fluent but can only engage in superficial communicative tasks)” in their article which was published in 1981 (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, “Characteristics” 90). The discussion of the JACET seminar seems to imply that CLT in Japan has not been successful enough to convince the English teachers of its capabilities.

Another common criticism of CLT is about its ambiguous definition. Sadao Takahashi points out that since virtually all the teaching methodologies boil down to teaching of communicative competence, defining CLT is extremely difficult (259). Some researchers also criticize the researchers and teachers who have embraced the idea of CLT without examining its effects. For example, Swan argues that there is a tendency for researchers and teachers to blindly welcome a new approach, which employs jargon to look promising but may not be more effective than the old ones. In his own words, we have just have been going for “the theoretical pendulum [which] swings from one extreme to the other, each exaggeration is followed by its opposite” and have not made much progress (86). He considers the Communicative Approach to be just one of the shifts in intellectual fashion and “not really in any sense a revolution” (87). Higuchi, who conducts research on communicative English teaching at California State University in Long Beach, writes that the Communicative Approach is by no means a solution to all the current problems with English teaching. Therefore, researchers and teachers should also consider the benefits of approaches in the past such as the Audio-lingual Approach and the Grammar-translation Method, which we tend to dismiss as old-fashioned (30).

Despite some criticisms of communication-oriented methodologies, we cannot deny that the interest of the Japanese researchers and teachers now focus on discovering how communicative skills can be taught effectively, whether or not it requires a more efficient form of what is now termed the Communicative Approach or combination of some pedagogical approaches. In this thesis, I intend to compare foreign language classes in Japan and a foreign country. Many studies have observed different language classes in Japan, and many researches conducted overseas also have given us insight into how languages are taught overseas. For example, Higuchi (1981), who has observed an actual practice of CLT in the U.S, argues that we need to encourage students to produce more output during classes.

He also suggests that we should integrate notional-functional syllabus and grammar-oriented syllabus (28-30). However, not many researches directly compare communicative language classes in different countries. The writer of this thesis has taken introductory Spanish courses at Japanese and American colleges and found that the American students acquired far better Spanish communicative skills compared with their Japanese counterparts. By directly comparing the two language courses of the two countries, I hope to 1) find out how communicative a language course is at a given Japanese university and 2) provide some clues to what can be improved to make it more communicative. The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is not to propose a new way of effective CLT based on the comparison of two Spanish courses. Rather, it aims to explain why the American Spanish course is more successful in teaching their students to communicate than the Japanese one based on the knowledge we have gained from previous researches.

II. Methods

In order to achieve the goal of this thesis, the first two semesters of two introductory Spanish classes, one at Rikkyo University in Japan and the other at Washington and Lee University in the U.S. (hereafter referred to as W&L) are chosen. Even though there are some significant differences between the two colleges in such areas as the numbers of students (Rikkyo has about eight times as many students as W&L), they are both private liberal arts colleges with long histories and good academic reputations, and the writer believes that the comparison of classes at the two colleges can be justified (for comparison of the two universities' academic reputations, learning environments and so on, see Appendix I). An American university is chosen because a language course taught at American universities should do a better job in teaching the students to communicate in the foreign language compared with Japanese ones. As Takashima has pointed out, most Japanese people have studied a foreign language to understand documents written in it and absorb knowledge (9-11). In some countries where they have many immigrants, however, people presumably are motivated to study a foreign language in order to talk with those who speak it. Therefore, I believe that a language course in the U.S, where they have far more

immigrants than in Japan, can give us some clues to how the instructors can teach their students to communicate in a foreign language and hence, may imply how we should change English education in Japan.

Spanish courses, not English courses, of the Japanese and American universities are chosen because W&L, at which I studied on an one-year exchange program, does not have any English classes designed for non-native speakers of English, providing no chances for me to observe EFL classes at American universities. Instead, the writer, who had had one and half years of preparation in Spanish at Rikkyo, took Spanish courses in the U.S. and found them quite different from those in his own country and decided to compare Spanish courses at Rikkyo and W&L. Therefore, choosing Spanish courses for comparison was not intended, but it happened that the comparison turned out very insightful for two reasons. First, since Spanish is not a second but a foreign language in Japan and America, choosing the language has enabled me to compare foreign language education in both countries. Comparison of English courses at Japanese and American universities will result in a comparison of foreign language education in Japan and second language education in the U.S. and may not be appropriate for the purpose of this thesis. The second language learners usually have more exposure to the language and are more motivated to learn it than foreign language learners because proficiency in it will give them economical and social benefits (Suzuki, "Weapon" 172-173). Comparing two language courses for learners with such different learning environments and degrees of motivation might reveal much about the sociolinguistic aspects of language teaching, but not give us many clues on how to make Japanese language teaching more communicative. Second, since I am much more unfamiliar with Spanish than with English, it is presumably easier for me to observe how and when learners acquire certain features of a foreign language with a Spanish course more than that of English. Because I already had had a certain command of English when I went to the U.S, taking an English language course would not have taught me much, and it would have been very difficult to see when and how language acquisition takes place.

Some may suspect, however, that the writer's involvement in the classes may hamper the objectivity of the descriptions of the classes. In fact, McLaughlin, Rossman, and McLeod (1983) have claimed that "introspection and subjective

reports are notoriously unreliable and easily mistaken” (qtd. in Schmidt and Frota 238). However, as the following sections may reveal, this thesis deals with two equivalent Spanish courses of entirely different natures, and it would be very difficult even for participants to misinterpret the differences between the two courses. Also, as Balta argues, it is possible to think that “only language learners themselves can be in a position to observe their experiences” (qtd. in Schmidt and Frota 238), and some observations made in the thesis would have been impossible if the writer had not participated in the classes. Some may also wonder whether the choice of a language course at an American university is really justifiable because in general, Americans are notorious for their indifference to and incompetence in foreign languages. For example, the President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies recognizes the young English-speaking Americans’ lack of skills in other languages and discusses “Americans’ scandalous incompetence in foreign languages” (qtd. in Salzmann 165). However, it turns out that the students at W&L, which is known for its excellent academic reputation, are more eager to learn foreign languages than average Americans, and the language education at the school turns out to be successful enough for the purpose of the thesis.

I believe there is also a good reason to compare the Spanish courses at Rikkyo and W&L because both of them are three-month introductory courses. Almost all of the Rikkyo and W&L students have little or no prior knowledge of Spanish and learn it as their third language (for the details of each introductory Spanish course, see Appendix II). I do not intend to claim that the courses at each college are representative of language classes in each country, but they are equivalent courses at universities with many similarities and should serve the aims of this thesis. The differences between the two courses will be discussed in the following section, III. Data, which is divided into three parts. The first part aims to explain how successfully W&L students acquire communicative skills in Spanish compared with Rikkyo students. The second and third parts attempt to explain why the American course is more successful in instilling communicative skills in Spanish in students, with the second discussing differences in teaching styles of the instructors and the third part in students’ preparation for the classes.

In describing the two Spanish classes, the writer does not choose to employ

COLT, an observation scheme to determine how communicative the language classes are, which I have already mentioned in relation with Suwa (1994). The scheme might be useful in adding objectivity to the study, but is not used in this thesis because as the following sections of the thesis may reveal, while the Spanish course at W&L is communicative, the one at Rikkyo is close to the Grammar-translation Method: according to Albright (1988), COLT has been designed exceptionally for the communicative approach (qtd. in Suwa 198), and employing a such system to Rikkyo's Grammar-translation class would be fruitless. However, the absence of an objective scheme may mean that there is no guarantee as to how representative the data presented in this thesis are. In order to compensate partially for such weakness, the writer has recorded two classes at W&L and Rikkyo respectively.³ The W&L classes that were recorded were the two last classes of the semester and a little different from usual classes. For example, while most of the W&L classes are conducted based on the textbook, the second last class focused on exercises on a handout that the instructor had made so that the students could prepare for the final exam. In the second recorded class at W&L, the professor allocates the first five minutes of class to explanations about the final exam, since it was the last class of the semester. The Rikkyo classes that have been recorded are not ideal for comparison because both recorded "Introduction to Spanish" classes are in its second semester; this thesis, as mentioned already, aims to compare the first semesters of introductory Spanish courses at W&L and Rikkyo. However, although the contents are more advanced in the second semester, pedagogical approaches and types of teacher-student discourse should be identical to those in the first semester. Despite some flaws, however, the recorded W&L and Rikkyo classes clearly demonstrate the characteristics of typical Spanish classes at W&L and Rikkyo, and the writer believes that the samples help illustrate the differences between the introductory Spanish classes at W&L and Rikkyo.

Besides the differences discussed in the third section, there are some other factors that are presumed to contribute to the W&L students' successful acquisition of Spanish communicative skills. Unlike the instructors' methodologies or students' preparation for their classes, they are kinds of factors about which neither the instructors nor the students can do anything and will be discussed in the fourth section, the External Factors. The fifth section, Conclusion, will suggest some ways

to make the Spanish course at Rikkyo more communicative. In the sixth section, Theoretical Implications, I will briefly summarize English education at Japanese high schools and universities based on a literature on the subject and discuss what the comparison of the two Spanish courses implies for English education in Japan.

Due to limitations of space, Section III and IV in the original thesis have been omitted from this publication. The interested readers are invited to contact the author at allabout@alumni.wlu.edu or t-nakata@momo.so-net.ne.jp.

V. Conclusion

The discussions so far suggest that instructors' teaching methodologies, students' preparation for classes, and some external factors may account for W&L students' more successful acquisition of Spanish communicative skills compared with Rikkyo students. In this section, I will try to suggest some ways to teach communicative skills to Rikkyo students more effectively.

i) External Factors

I have observed that the W&L students acquire far better communicative skills than their Rikkyo counterparts, who learn Spanish by the Grammar-translation Method, but I believe that introducing the W&L's methodology as it is to Rikkyo will turn out a complete disaster. The Communicative Approach may seem better equipped to teach communicative skills, but given the external factors which have been mentioned already, if Rikkyo teachers decide to use the Communicative Approach, the students will end up in devoting what little time they have for Spanish classes to conversation practice and learning nothing more than greetings and some other fixed phrases. Although the Grammar-translation Method has been criticized since 19th century for not being very effective in teaching practical communicative skills, it is also known for "teaching accurate sentence structures of the target language" and helping the learners "to learn the basics of the language in a short period of time" (JACET 51).⁴ Therefore, I will argue that the Grammar-translation Method will be best suited for the aim of the course if those which I

classified as external factors stay the same. In order to teach communicative skills to Rikkyo students effectively, we need to address some external factors first.

However, as you may have noticed, some of the factors which I have termed external factors are very difficult to change. The differences in the educational systems between Japanese and American universities can be changed, but only with drastic reform on educational systems by school administrations. Although cultural differences between Japanese and American people and linguistic differences between the Japanese and English language seem almost impossible to change, I believe that we can try to overcome these differences. For example, as for cultural differences, I have pointed out that since Japanese people hesitate to stand out within groups, instructors' efforts to make them speak up in Spanish would turn out to be fruitless. However, if we reduce the number of students in a classroom and create an atmosphere where students get to know each other, they will feel more comfortable speaking up in classes.⁵ Linguistic differences between the target language and the students' first language might be impossible to change, but I suggest that Rikkyo professors take more advantage of the students' knowledge of English because almost all the Rikkyo students should have studied English as their first foreign language. Nobuyuki Hino, a professor of English at Tokyo International University, reflects on his experience of learning German and argues that taking advantage of knowledge of English should serve Japanese learners in acquisition of other foreign languages (81). It is true that an inference from English sometimes results in negative transfer, but the fact that W&L students learn more vocabulary and grammatical features than Rikkyo students seems to suggest that knowledge of English is useful in learning Spanish. Hino also writes that contrasting a second foreign language with English is also useful in bringing into their consciousness Japanese students' errors resulting from negative transfer from English, helping to eliminate such errors (81). Most of the external factors are very difficult to change, but in order to teach communicative skills in Rikkyo students, addressing such factors will be necessary; introducing the Communicative Approach without changing some external factors would result in teaching a very low-level of communicative competence.

ii) Instructors' Teaching Methodologies

If we can change some external factors, I suggest changing the following five things regarding instructor' s teaching methodologies to effectively teach Rikkyo students to communicate in Spanish. First, more chances to speak in the foreign language during classes should be given to Rikkyo students. As Swain argues, output helps students acquire language (Swain, "Three" 125-126). The speaking capabilities of elementary students are limited, but as A does, professors can provide their students with opportunities to speak in the target language by asking them to translate sentences or phrases into the foreign language or interacting with them in it. Unlike Nunan (1987), who believes that non-contrived authentic materials are an imperative for CLT (136-145), I believe that instructors do not always have to engage in real communications; as Swan argues, occasional pseudo-communications should be justified (82-84). Next, I suggest that Rikkyo professors speak in Spanish as much as possible in order to improve students' listening ability, which is an important aspect of communicative skills (Nord). In providing input, as A does, instructors should make sure that it will be comprehensible to their students because only comprehensible input contributes to language acquisition (Krashen). Third, Rikkyo instructors should be more concerned with the sociological aspect of language because "the ability to produce and recognize socially appropriate language within a given sociocultural context" is part of ones' communicative competence (Swain, "Communicative" 242). Fourth, it might not be a bad idea for Rikkyo professors to conduct quizzes regularly and include dictation and many Spanish composition questions in them. Finally, using textbooks with more Spanish composition exercises will help students to acquire communicative skills in Spanish.

iii) Students' Preparation for the Classes

Besides some changes in external factors and teaching methodologies, in order for the Communicative Approach to work, Rikkyo students will have to change the ways in which they prepare for classes. The comparison of the two Spanish courses may imply three changes in Rikkyo students' preparation for classes. First, Rikkyo instructors should require their students to memorize more vocabulary because, as Swan argues, acquisition of vocabulary is important in making a learner successful

communicator (81). Second, Rikkyo students may not have to consult a dictionary very often. Professors at Rikkyo encourage their students to consult a dictionary when they encounter unfamiliar words in reading comprehension or exercises, which they seem to believe will help their students to acquire vocabulary. By contrast, the majority of expressions that W&L students acquire seem to be learned in isolation: A requires his students to learn expressions in the vocabulary sections of the textbook, where the Spanish lexical items are presented with English translations and sometimes with pictures but seldom with any given context. The American students may learn some new expressions in reading comprehension material or exercises incidentally, but they do not account for much of the vocabulary acquired by W&L students. Singleton (1997), Brown (1994), and Huckin and Coady (1999), who argue that learners tend to acquire vocabulary better with context, seem to support Rikkyo professors' method of vocabulary teaching. However, as I have pointed out in III - i), it is not the Rikkyo students but the W&L students that acquire much more vocabulary. Some may feel that linguistic differences between Spanish and the students' L1 may account for the American students' successful acquisition of much vocabulary, and it is certainly true that some portion of lexical items that W&L students have to learn are similar to English words in form and should be easily acquired by them based on their knowledge of L1. However, even if we subtract the number of this kind of lexical items, my feeling is that W&L students acquire far more vocabulary than Rikkyo students do and that A's method of vocabulary teaching is more successful than that of Rikkyo instructors'. There are some researchers who side with A. For example, Nation argues that learning lists of words enable learners to acquire large numbers of words in a very short time although he admits that is "only the first step in mastering new vocabulary" (126-127). Huckin and Coady argue that lexical items should be put in context to be learned, but they also make it clear that some basic 2000 to 3000 words are exceptions and should be memorized in isolation (181-193). Since now we are dealing with students at elementary level, who obviously have not learned a few thousand words, saving the students time-consuming tasks of consulting dictionaries and instead letting them allocate more time for learning basic vocabulary would not be a bad idea. In order to do so, using a textbook like W&L's, which has translations for most of the words that should be

unfamiliar to students, is suggested. Lastly, Rikkyo instructors may want to make their students learn Spanish grammar by themselves so that they can allocate more class hours for speaking practice or answer students' questions for their better understanding of the language.

VI. Theoretical Implications

So far, this thesis has been concerned mostly with comparison of Spanish courses at the American and Japanese universities. This section discusses what the comparison implies for English education in Japan. Needless to say, what applies to Spanish education in Japan does not necessarily apply to English education in this country because English has been accorded a somewhat different status from other foreign languages. Generally speaking, English is far more widely studied than Spanish because most Japanese people study English as their first foreign language, and other languages such as Chinese, Korean, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, and Russian are studied as their second foreign language. As I have pointed out in Introduction, more and more Japanese people have also started to regard English as the international language, and it is assumed that acquisition of communicative skills is emphasized more in English teaching than teaching of other foreign languages. The different statuses accorded to English and other foreign languages can also be seen at Rikkyo University, where I have conducted research. According to Rikkyo's Office of General Education, the number of freshmen taking Spanish is about one fifth of those taking English; while about 3,600 freshmen study English, only 690 of them are enrolled in Spanish (cf. Figure 9).

One English professor has also told the writer that although considerable changes have been made in English education at Rikkyo to make it more communicative, reforms on curriculum of other languages have yet to be undertaken.

Figure 9 Number and percentage of freshmen enrolled in a foreign language course at Rikkyo (2001)

English ⁶	3,579	100.0%	Chinese	1,006	28.1%	French	912	25.5%	Spanish	690	19.3%
German	679	19.0%	Korean	91	2.5%	Russian	22	0.6%			

Since English is treated somewhat differently from other foreign languages in Japan, suggesting some changes on Japan's English education based on the comparison of two Spanish courses at W&L and Rikkyo will be misleading. However, many have pointed out that English education has had many things in common with teaching of other languages in this country. For example, Suzuki points out that English, French, and German have played an important role in the development of modern Japan and that teaching of these three languages have one thing in common: they have traditionally focused on instilling receptive skills in the students (Suzuki, "Weapon" 16). Hino also writes that whether the target language is English, German, or Chinese, Japanese foreign language education has been conducted with the Grammar-translation Method and has paid little attention to pronunciation. Based on the comparison of the two Spanish courses, the following subsections suggest some changes on English education in Japan, especially changes on the areas where English and Spanish education seem to share similar problems.

Methodology

At Rikkyo's "Introduction to Spanish", the Grammar-translation Method seems to be employed, and its use may be justified considering the constraints imposed by the educational systems, the students' culture and L1, Spanish's status of being a second foreign language, the aim of the course, and so on. It seems that the Grammar-translation is used not only by so-called "第二外国語 (*Daini Gaikoku-go* = second foreign language)" teachers like professors teaching Spanish at Rikkyo but also by English teachers. According to 朝日新聞 (*Asahi Newspaper*), for example, in 1993, the Ministry of Education reported that Japanese English education had focused too much on the Grammar-translation Method (qtd. in Takefuta 24). Considering that the Ministry had already acknowledged the need to teach communicative skills to students in 1977 (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, "What" 56), the report suggests that despite changes in people's expectations for the goals of English teaching, the Grammar-translation Method has continued to play a central role in Japanese English teaching. Although the nation's interest shifted from Grammar-translation to communication, because of "Japanese people's tendency to favor written words more than spoken ones",

the Grammar-translation Method has persisted and influenced the country's English education to a great extent (JACET 51).

As mentioned earlier, the advantage of the Grammar-translation Method is usually understood as its ability to teach the fundamentals of the target language systematically to elementary students. Therefore, in teaching English at university level, we can expect instructors to focus on practical communicative skills because almost all of their students have studied English for six years and should have enough knowledge about grammar and vocabulary of the language. However, a substantial amount of literature exists to prove that communicative skills are not taught very successfully at universities. For example, Hino argues that College English professors tend to employ the Grammar-translation Method more than teachers at senior high schools (27). A survey conducted by Koike et. al in 1990 discovers that less than 50% of college English instructors think teaching communicative skills is the main goal of college English education while 60.1% of college students and 78.3% of adults do so (qtd. in Takufuta 37), which may explain more focus on the Grammar-translation rather than communication even at university level. Suzuki argues that the conflicting views on the goals of English teaching stem from differences in how college teachers and students see English. According to him, while many students see English as the international language, a tool with which they can communicate with foreign people, most professors consider English to be the language of either the U.S. or Britain: hence, they try to teach the culture or literature of the two countries through it and emphasize reading comprehension rather than communication (Suzuki, "Weapon" 146-147). Hino argues that the reason why the Grammar-translation Method still prevails at universities is that most college English professors have studied exclusively either literature or linguistics and are not really fluent in English or interested in teaching it. "Language, Literature, and Education," a round-table discussion which concluded JACET (=Japanese Association of College English Teachers) Kyoto Seminar 2001 seems to shed some light on why some college English professors still prefer the Grammar-translation Method to the Communicative Approach despite the nation's growing interest in communicative skills. Professor Saito of Tokyo University argues that since language and literature are inseparable from each other, language and literature should be integrated in class. Therefore, in his

view, teaching language through literature is a natural approach.

William Zinsser, who has taught English writing at Yale and written 13 books, disagrees with Professor Saito. Zinsser insists that American colleges have failed to teach writing skills to students because traditionally, the English professors, whose specialization is “literature- not how to write, but how to read” (13), have been responsible for teaching writing. He shares his experience of launching a comprehensive writing program called “writing across the curriculum” at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota (12). Under the program, not only the English professors but also the professors from many different disciplines share the responsibility of teaching writing and conduct classes with emphasis on writing, where the students read a literature on such disciplines as Anthropology, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics, Nursing, Politics, and so on and write about the subjects. Zinsser writes that the results were astounding: writing classes taught by English professors tend to have “a strong literary bias” (52) and the students tend to “reach for a ‘literary style’ and imitate “what academics write and read [which] is fuzzy and verbose” (13-14). However, under the new writing curriculum, students learn to write clearly and precisely. Also, since the students can choose to write not only about literature but about what really interest them, they have higher motivation to write and learn to write more effectively.

Zinsser’s description of the “writing across the curriculum” program seems to suggest that people can improve their language skills without help of literature. In the writing program, Zinsser observes that the students learn to write more effectively than in traditional English writing classes where language and literature are integrated. Of course, the program is exclusively for native speakers of English, and there is no guarantee that such a program will work for non-native speakers of the language as well. However, I believe that such a program will work all the more for non-native speakers based on my own experience. When I was studying at W&L, I took two writing courses; one using literature as materials and the other allowing me to choose to write about what interests me. In the former course, since we were required to read several literary works and write essays about them, I ended up spending more time reading and interpreting works than organizing or writing a paper. The instructor also graded my papers based primarily on the contents of the papers. Although I think my reading skills may have improved, I am

not sure about my writing. In the latter course, however, since I could choose to write about such subjects as journalism, politics, and linguistics, the subjects of my own choice and what really interested me, I could come up with what to say more easily and spend more time on the actual writing than reading, which I believe improved my writing skills more rapidly. Professor Saito argues that if language and literature are not integrated in class, students end up learning low-level, casual communication competence rather than the ability to engage in sophisticated communication, but nobody could argue that the ability to write about literature is more sophisticated skill than one to write about other disciplines such as journalism, politics, and linguistics. I believe that using subjects that the students find interesting to them is most of the time better than using literature as materials, especially for non-native speakers of the language, whose reading ability is limited. Takao Suzuki, for example, argues that literature is not appropriate as a material for foreign language textbooks (Suzuki, "Confined" 220-221).

So far, the discussion has focused only on the writing skill, but it would be reasonable to think that it can be applied to language skills in general. Therefore, I do not find what some college English professors seem to believe — that teaching language through literature is the best way to teach language, which is often used as a rationale for the Grammar-translation Method at university level — very convincing and would like to suggest introducing CLT in college English classes.

I have not mentioned literary skills, meaning reading and writing skills, acquired by W&L students but I should point out that less emphasis on reading comprehension in the W&L course does not mean that W&L students cannot read as much as Rikkyo students. On the contrary, I have noticed that students at W&L could read more difficult and longer Spanish passages by the end of the first semester about such topics as history of Spanish culture, arts in Spain, Mexican culture, and so on including an excerpt from a literary text. The materials they read range from one to four pages while Rikkyo students are required to read no more than one-page passage. In the second semester of "Elementary Spanish" at W&L, students are required to write a passage ranging from 80 to 400 words about such topics as "a description of dream," "a letter of requests addressed to Congress," "seeking information about Venezuela," and so on. By contrast, Spanish sentences that the students in "スペイン語強化2 (*Spein-go Kyoka* II = Intensive

Spanish II)” at Rikkyo are required to compose based on Japanese translations are much simpler: the students in the course are given four handouts, each of which has 10 to 15 Japanese sentences to be translated into Spanish. Appendix V lists all the 11 Japanese sentences on the fourth handout, which contains more grammatically complex sentences than the other three. An examination of sentences may reveal that the sentences that the students are required to translate are such easy sentences as “けさは、雨がたくさん降りました (It rained heavily this morning),” “デパートは、10時ごろにはあいているでしょう (The department store will be open by ten),” “一人の子供が、泣きながらやって来ました (One child came to us crying)” and so on. The comparison of the Spanish sentences that the students have to write for W&L’s “Elementary Spanish” and Rikkyo’s “Intensive Spanish II” reveals that the American students in their second semester of Spanish are required to write far more complex Spanish sentences than the Rikkyo students who have already completed three or four semesters of Spanish and are taking an elective course.⁷ Factors such as linguistic similarities between the students’ L1 and the target language and students’ course loads have to be taken into account, but we may argue that CLT does not necessarily produce a lack of literary skills, as some of its skeptics argue.

I would also like to point out that CLT may be feasible not only at universities but also at high schools. The observations of the introductory Spanish course at W&L may justify teaching communicative skills at the elementary level. Previous researches also seem to verify teaching communicative skills to elementary students. For example, Brumfit’s study conducted in India, which is well-known as “Bangalore Project”, has observed development of language acquisition of two groups of students at elementary level: the ones who have been taught with task-based communicative activities and the others with ordinary grammar-oriented syllabuses. After three years of observation, Brumfit discovers that the former group demonstrates better communicative and grammatical performance and argues that CLT at elementary level is effective (233-241). Nunan, who has observed five communicative language lessons, concludes that “when learners’ interests are engaged, and when they are able to bring their own backgrounds schemata to classroom interactions, these can begin to be truly communicative, even with very basic learners” and argues that use of referential questions makes CLT possible

even with students who have little preparation in the language (144). Some may be tempted to think that studies conducted overseas are not always applicable to Japanese learners due to linguistic distances between Japanese and English. In fact, in a discussion at JACET Kyoto Seminar, Professor Saito criticizes a tendency for Japanese English teachers to import new language teaching methodologies developed overseas as they are. He argues that due to linguistic distances between Japanese and English, methodologies that are successful in other countries may not work in this country and insists that we need pedagogical approaches designed especially for Japanese people. However, we should bear in mind that the study conducted by Sano et. al (1978-1981), which I have quoted several times in this thesis, has observed communicative English classes at Japanese high schools over three years and concluded that CLT is not impossible even with Japanese high school students (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, "Characteristics" 88).

Teachers

Discussions on teaching methodologies in the previous subsection may lead us into a discussion on teachers' English proficiency. I have already pointed out that Hino attributes the persistent use of Grammar-translation at universities to instructors who specialize in literature or linguistics and lack enthusiasm for and expertise in language teaching. He argues that it holds true for high schools as well: most of today's high school English teachers mainly study literature or linguistics at college and lack expertise in English teaching, and sometimes are unable to communicate in the language (26-30). Sano et al, who claim that CLT works even for high school students, acknowledges the important role played by instructors (Sano, Takahashi, and Yokoyama, "Characteristics" 88). Since the importance of instructors is such, I would also like to consider the implications that the comparison of the Spanish courses have for qualifications of English teachers in Japan.

In order for instructors to teach communicative skills in a foreign language, no doubt teachers should be able to communicate well in the language because they need to provide output to and interact with their students. The observation of the introductory Spanish courses at Rikkyo and W&L suggests the importance of instructors' communicative skills. I have observed that A speaks in Spanish

frequently in order to encourage his students to speak up in the language. If A did not have good communicative competence in Spanish, interactions with his students would not succeed. I have also pointed out that some output that A provides becomes comprehensible input, which according to Krashen, contributes to learners' language acquisition if understood with contextual clues. If A lacked the ability to speak correctly in Spanish, his students would run the risk of acquiring what is grammatically or sociolinguistically unacceptable. As Canale and Swain argue, "the teacher must have a fairly high level of communicative competence in the second language" because they need to be "an instigator of and participant in meaningful communication" (33). However, it is often pointed out that Japanese English teachers do not have enough communicative competence in English. For example, Takao Suzuki writes, "日本の知識人の中で英語が一番まともに使えない人種は、英語を専門とする大学教授と、中学高校の英語教師だ (Among the educated Japanese, college English professors and junior and senior high school English teachers are the ones that have the lowest English proficiency)" ("Weapon" 80). Ellis also cites "[t]eachers unable to speak English" as one of the problems of English teaching in this country (7). Since the teachers' proficiency is very crucial to students' acquisition of language, especially so in communication-oriented classes as the comparison of two Spanish courses imply, we may need to reform the procedures to give English teaching certificates in order to make sure that only those that have good English communicative skills are qualified to teach.

The comparison of the two Spanish courses also suggests changes on not only the proficiency of English teachers but the roles played by them. I have observed that while A often interacts with his students, Rikkyo professors tend to engage in one-way communications and are more like lecturers. Uesugi argues that this kind of communication style also applies to most English teachers (qtd. in Takefuta 26-27). The differences in how teachers communicate with their students may stem from cultural differences between Japan and the U.S., but in order for instructors to teach communicative skills, they may need to interact with their students more spontaneously as A does.

Educational Systems

The discussions about two Spanish courses have also implied that constraints on language classes imposed by educational systems may affect teachers' methodologies, and hence, students' acquisition of the target language to a great extent. For example, it would not be very difficult to see how the instructors' communication style, which is discussed in the previous subsection, may be affected by class sizes. A member of the editorial staff of *Asahi Newspaper* writes, “四十人もの多人数クラスでは、「話す、聞く」重視の授業にも限界があるだろう。…欧米並みの少人数クラスに踏み切るべき時期だ (The instructors' effort to conduct classes that focus on acquisition of speaking and listening abilities will be hampered if there are forty students in one classroom ... It is time that we limited the numbers of students in language classes to as low as those in American and European classrooms)” (qtd. in Takefuta 26). Uesugi also writes, “60人に近い学生を前にして、教師が感じるやりきれなさを何とかしなくてはなるまい。学生20人に教師一人という形を目指さない限り、どんなに素晴らしい教育理念もただのお題目である (Something needs to be done about bewilderment felt by a teacher who have to teach as many as 60 students all by him/herself. Requiring a teacher to teach more than 20 students would impair any educational philosophy no matter how excellent it may be)” (qtd. in Takefuta 26-27). Not only the number of students in a class but other features of the educational systems such as students' course loads, frequency of class meetings, and total class hours are likely to affect how the language is taught at schools, and hence, students' acquisition of a foreign language. The comparison of the two introductory Spanish courses implies that fundamental changes in Japanese educational systems may be necessary to change language teaching in the country and that more effective English teaching in Japan may call for revolutionary reforms on the country's educational systems.

Exams

The comparison of the two Spanish classes has also implied that the types and frequencies of the tests administered by teachers affect the acquisition of a foreign language. The English college entrance exams need to be changed if we think of the influence of the exams on students' achievements. Many have criticized the

English entrance exams for college as being unpractical. For example, Suzuki writes that many educated British and Americans living in Japan think that English they find in college entrance is too old and impractical. According to Suzuki, when eight native speakers from the *Asahi Evening News* took a standardized English exam for college entrance, their impressions about the test were, “trivial, terrible, irritating, sordid, bad, ambiguous, dreadful and culture-bound” (qtd. in Suzuki “Weapon” 200). In a lecture he gave at Rikkyo University, Ellis claimed that we should develop new, more communicative exams (8). It is notable that he said that communicative exams do not necessarily have to involve listening or speaking activities: according to him, communicative reading or writing exams are possible. If high schools and colleges give communicative exams, the students, whose study habits are generally affected by the kinds of tests they have to take, may shift their attention from the Grammar-translation to communication, contributing to the acquisition of communicative skills.

Use of Dictionaries

One of the assumptions that Japanese English teachers have about vocabulary building seems the importance of consulting a dictionary. However, the comparison of the two Spanish courses and relevant discussion seem to imply that learning words in isolation is sometimes effective. The validity of letting the students refer to a dictionary for unfamiliar lexical items in reading rather than providing the translations as notes is still open to question and calls for additional research.

Afterthoughts

This thesis has compared two Spanish courses of equivalent level at Rikkyo and W&L and considered the reasons why the American students acquire better communicative skills than the Japanese students in order to suggest some ways to make the Spanish course at Rikkyo more communicative. I have also briefly discussed what the comparison may imply for English education in Japan. Although the two schools seem to share many characteristics and the classes are on an equivalent level, it turns out that there are a great deal of external factors such as differences in the educational systems of both universities, and the cultures and mother tongues of the American and Japanese students, which presumably affects

students' language acquisition. I have to admit that such differences have made it very difficult to determine whether or not the differences in the students' language acquisition are direct results of different pedagogical approaches employed by professors at W&L and Rikkyo. However, I believe that the discussions on how factors other than the instructors' teaching methodologies and students' preparation for classes are at least insightful for two reasons. First, I find the discussions insightful because they have suggested that many factors which neither the instructors nor the students can do anything about may affect the students' language acquisition to a great extent, which implies that in order to change English education in Japan, we may need a fundamental reform of the Japanese educational system.

Second, the discussions on the external factors are also insightful because in my view, they have raised the issue of whether the Communicative Approach is really better than the Grammar-translation. It seems that the comparison of two introductory Spanish courses has revealed that the Grammar-translation Method actually works better than the Communicative Approach at Rikkyo: considering the external factors, CLT at Rikkyo may let the students acquire no more than fairly low-level communicative competence, and the Grammar-translation Method, which enables the students to "learn the basics of the language in a short period of time" (JACET 51), would be more suitable for the aim of the course. However, the Communicative Approach has been the buzzword for the last two decades both overseas and nationally, and some people seem to feel that the method should be employed for teaching of any language at any level. We may have to bear in mind that Professor Saito at Tokyo University, whose remarks in JACET Kyoto Seminar 2001 I have quoted several times in this thesis, argues that people learn language for different reasons, and that different pedagogical approaches should be provided for different learners. According to him, teaching communicative skills to the public is fruitless because it will produce those who can engage only in low-level communicative tasks, contributing little to the nation. What we need is English education for elites who may potentially play an important role in the country's politics, economics, and culture that enables them to carry out sophisticated and intellectual dialogue with native English speakers (Saito 48-49). Instead of being obsessed with the notion of communication, Japanese English teachers should

decide what methodology best suits their students' purpose given some constraints imposed by educational systems, linguistic differences between the target language and Japanese, and so on.

Despite my best efforts, some flaws have been unavoidable. For one thing, I consider the major weakness of this thesis to be a lack of objective scheme in describing the two Spanish courses. I should have decided on one scheme such as COLT before starting observing classes, which was impossible because I took the both courses as a student, and the idea of comparing the two for the thesis occurred to me after I finished the course at Rikkyo. I sincerely hope that the examples of tests for each course and the recordings of some classes at Rikkyo and W&L add some objectivity to my descriptions of the courses. I am also willing to accept the criticism that while the comparison of the Spanish courses are based on my observations, the description of Japanese English education relies heavily on research on the subject rather than my own experience. In choosing sources to depend on, the best effort has been made to select a literature which is comprehensive and gives us a big picture of English education in our nation rather than one that deals with extreme examples and presents the situations out of proportion. Making general comments on English education in the country, however, involves reconciling various conflicting views, and I concede that it is very difficult to verify the validity of the information I have quoted.

Notes

- * In writing this thesis, I have owed much to many, especially to the following four professors; Professor Alfred G. Fralin has conducted language classes that are completely new to me, where all the ideas for this thesis started; Professor Fujiko Sano has referred me to many useful and instructive books and papers about Second Language Acquisition, giving me a whole new perspective on language teaching and learning; Professor Kary Smout, my advisor in the U.S, has taught me to write effectively and concisely and also helped me a great deal to structure Part III of this thesis, which forms a basis for this entire work; and above all, my advisor, Professor Yoshihiro Yoshino, has continuously given me invaluable advice, encouragement and constructive criticism, kindly making his important literature available to me.

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- 1 Hereafter, all the translations for Japanese and Spanish phrases and sentences are mine unless otherwise specified.
- 2 I appreciate the courtesy of Professor Yoshino at Rikkyo University, one of the participants of the seminar, who has lent me a cassette tape in which he recorded the discussion.
- 3 I am grateful to Professor Uchida for kindly recording six of his classes. The generosity of his students, who have given the permission for their classes to be recorded, is also appreciated. Rikkyo classes have been recorded in two out of six tapes, Tape (1) and Tape (2), and classes in two other universities are recorded in the other tapes, Tape (3) to Tape (6), for your reference. See Appendix VI for details.
As shown in Appendix VI.
- 4 Professor Saito, one of the participants of the round-table discussion at JACET Kyoto Seminar 2001, which I have already quoted, also argues that we should not dismiss the Grammar-translation Method as old-fashioned because the long history of the method has proven its efficiency.
- 5 In fact, in an intensive Spanish course in which I am enrolled, where there are usually no more than 10 students, I have discovered that students do not hesitate to speak up during classes. It may be due to a small class size that makes students comfortable expressing themselves. However, since the course is elective, we have to bear in mind that the students in the intensive course have high motivations, which should contribute to their willingness to speak up to a great extent.
- 6 The number for English also includes the students who have placed out on the placement tests and been exempted from freshman English.
- 7 In order to enroll in Rikkyo's Intensive Spanish, students have to have six credits in basic Spanish courses. Most students take four semesters of Spanish (in their freshmen and sophomore years) to get the six credits, but the students who demonstrate good competence and are willing to do so can be enrolled in "コミュニカティブ・コース (the

Communicative Course)", where they can get six credits in three semesters, not four.

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