The Motivational Factors Identified in a Humanistic Approach to English Learning

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The descriptions of impressions about English courses by science major students at a university are analyzed for the purpose of identifying motivational factors in English learning courses. A kind of the Humanistic Approach was taken to provide a writing task. This particular approach was found to be a basis for the evaluation of English teaching courses. As the research findings, 58 items were identified as motivational factors under 10 headings.

Introduction

There were two main purposes in this research. The first one was to identify the factors which relate to an evaluation by students toward an English teaching course, and the other was to investigate motivational factors by analyzing the descriptions about the course by the students.

In this paper, an approach in which English was learned holistically through a writing course where every student had his or her theme of their interest, read what they needed to, thought about the discourse most appropriate to express their ideas and voluntarily presented their writings was evaluated by the students. The students were asked a description of their impressions about the course. In this research, higher percentage of the students were found to have some kind of complexes toward English learning, and the complexes seemed to be related to their past English learning experiences.

What then would motivate the students who had those bad impressions about it ? The course in this research could be evaluated as highly motivational, and the description of the course will also provide a clue to the motivational factors for the learning of English.

Hypotheses

The Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-lingual Approach has been criticized by many English teaching professionals*[1], though who have been most complaint of those approaches must be the learners who had no chance or knowledge of explicitly criticizing about the teaching of their English teachers. Many of the students had been taught English in either or in both of the methods in their junior high or high school in Japan. Those who do not think they have been successful learners of English need some other approaches and methods. By joining an innovative course, they will be able to evaluate both their past learning and the new approach.

Another expectation for the research was that if the course was evaluated positively by the students, the clues to motivate students would be known from the items they raised. What are their standards of an evaluation of an English learning course ? What each factor of the evaluation should be like in a good English course for them ?

The course description

The English course I and V are for reading and III and VII are for grammar and writing. The course V is the advanced one of the course I, and VII of III.

The philosophy of the courses

The philosophy chosen by the instructor for those classes was a kind of the Humanistic Approach. The learner centeredness was sought after as the basic philosophy and the process oriented approach was recommended the students as a procedure to learn in the classes.

The same basic text "The Humanistic Approach to English Teaching and Learning"[*2] was used for every class. The textbook was organized from two parts, one consisting of twenty-two enlightening short stories for motivating the students for learning and the other of introduction to the discourse of the English language. In the reading classes, the knowledge of the discourse of English will help execute top-down processing of texts they read and find the authors' points in reading. The students were advised to read books that were of their interest. In the writing classes the same knowledge was provided.

The same task was given to all the students in those various classes, and that was the only one assignment for the classes. That was a writing task. With the knowledge about the discourse of English, students were required to choose their own theme, read related books and write a report which should have been composed of the coherent sets of paragraphs. The paper submitted by the students should have included an author's point and the supporting details such as examples, quotes from authorities, facts, reasons, etc.

The computer assisted language learning labs (CALLL) were used for the classes except for the industrial chemistry 1 class for a schedule problem. The CALLL 1 was equipped with five sets of 12 networked Macintosh computers 8100 and the CALLL 2 with 4 sets of G 3 s in the same setting. The networks could be changed as a group of four to twelve computers for the group learning.

Research Method:

The subjects were total 327 students who took English I, III, V, VII at Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics. The students were all science majors. It was not a statistical record but more than 80 percent of them showed negative attitude toward the English learning at the beginning of the semester.

TABLE I. SUBJECTS

MAJOR/CLASS	Grade	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	COURSE
Electronic Engineering	1	65	I
Optical Engineering 1	1	57	I
Optical Engineering 3	1	38	III
Image Engineering	2	53	VII
Industrial Chemistry 1	2	53	V
Industrial Chemistry 2	2	61	VII

After the 12 times of the learning in their course. Free descriptions by the students were gathered, which asked to write comments about the course. The data were separated into sentences and then broken into the smallest meaningful units and finally in the form of phrases and words. Then they were analyzed by being categorized under the main headings and the subheadings. For example, the sentence "I think learning the discourse of English language is a good way of learning English." was counted as "learning the discourse of English (positive)" categorized under the heading of the "Method".

Results and discussion

The results of the categorization of the students' description are in Table 2. What is worthy of special mention is that 41 students answered they hated learning English, and in that condition, 57 of the total wrote they were motivated to learn English and 74 wrote they would make more efforts to learn English, which meant the total 131 (40.1%) students answered they were motivated. This might suggest that the approach examined in this research was worth described along with the main purpose of the standards of evaluating English courses presented by university students.

TABLE II. THE STANDARDS OF THE EVALUATION OF AN ENGLISH COURSE

Key Words, number of the description, (n) negative, positive without the mark (examples of the student comments)

Teaching philosophy
 newness of teaching method for students 66 (newness, surprise), learner centered 38, process oriented 15, grammar translation 55 (n), junior/high school 27 (n) ,(translation, drills, reading and writing, pronunciation), mal-adaptation for new approach 7 (n), audio-lingual 3 (n)
Atmosphere of the class
 enjoyment or interest 114, university likeness 19, relaxed 14, knowledge of miscellaneous matters 13, instructive 5, class schedule 10 (n), assessment of teaching method 7 (n), whispering 1 (n),
Course objectives
 use of discourse knowledge 45, usefulness 23, overall skills of English 6, uselessness 2 (n),
Method
 native language used in the initial stage of the course 43, use of too much Japanese 12 (n)
Syllabus
 Selecting own topics and planing a research for the student-self 102, (help the future writing of papers, experience of paper writing was enjoyable, writing a paper in English is fun)
Tasks
 presentation volunteered 7, knowledge about English learning 2, movie 2, TOEIC 2, conversation 1, branching note 1, writing for e-mail 1, grammar 1, reading comprehension 1, quality of information 1, quantity of information 1, being logical 1, question and answer 5 (n), level 1 (n)

Textbook

    interesting contents 19, motivating 9, glossary 1, practices 1

Evaluation

    writing about his/her opinion is tough but fun 45, small tests 2, anxiety for final examination 12 (n), too much burden of a writing task 12 (n), feel of own achievement 7 (n)

Equipment

    computer 65, (typing taught, using computer creatively), multimedia 1 (for student samples), computer stress 12 (n), (dry eyes, awkwardness in using computer, old type of computer, freeze), volume of microphone (in CALLL 2) 3 (n), multimedia 1 (n), portable microphone 1 (n)

Instructor

    clarity of explanation 10, communication outside of the classroom 9, friendliness 9, joke, humor 9, kind 6, courteous 4, self-independence 1

Motivational Factors Identified

    The students' comments were categorized under the ten headings above. According to the results, the framework of motivational factors were found similar to the framework for the description of a teaching method (cf. Richards, et al, 1986). The students' preferences shown under the framework will precisely explain the motivational factors.

    To summarize the preferences, the students preferred the innovative teaching than the traditional approaches, more freedom of their learning in every respect, the usefulness of the course contents, the use of native language at the initial stage of the course with a gradual shift to a target language, experiences rather than memorization, and the use of a computer.

    About the negative side of the description, The past learning experience effected the preferences of the teaching. The total 85 (26.0%) students showed negative responses toward the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-lingual Approach and the method used in junior high schools and high schools.

How students were motivated

    Presenting students' evaluation will explain the contents in Table 2, and will also suggest how the students were motivated.

English is not a set of vocabularies and grammar rules but a living language:

        I realized that memorizing vocabularies and grammar rules is not the only way of learning English. I noticed I was passive in learning and knew how I could be active by writing a paper in this course. I have been learning English for seven years and I could find another approach to English learning just now.[3]

        In this course I found that what I have been learning did not work at all. What I need are to identify the author's points in reading and to organize paragraphs to make my writing

effective...*4

I would like my English courses more creative. As a university student, I was satisfied with the method of writing in English for myself...*5

I enjoyed learning English as a language rather than as a knowledge for passing an examination...*6

In this writing task, the students' focuses were on communication rather than structures. The vocabularies, the grammar rules, the pronunciation rules were what they needed to make themselves understood. They were trying to be effective in communicating but not to ignore the grammar rules. Some students felt the satisfaction of learning at a university not at a high school through the student-centered approach. They are now using a language rather than memorizing the components.

The nature of motivation raised in this approach:

I have been bad at learning English. I was worried about learning English at a university, but this approach with a computer is quite new and I could enjoy learning. Selecting my own theme and translating what I wanted to say were really hard but it was when I did it that I thought I would like to learn more English and communicate my thought better. I think I came to like learning English now.*7

I wanted to express what I wanted to say in the writing. I thought I wanted to be able to communicate my thought. I was interested in the course. I think I learned many things about the discourse of English. I have hated English lessons, but I love this course.*8

Why didn't I read my paper voluntarily in front of the classmates ? That is because I could not. My paper was not satisfactory... If I have another chance I would try real hard to write a good paper and present it...*9

...I don' t want to do which is not of my interest, but in writing my original paper, I did not feel pain looking up words in a dictionary.*10

In this class English was not taught at all at first. Gradually, though, English is taught and quite naturally I began writing English. I was not interested in learning English, but I devoted myself in writing English. That never had happened in my life. Translating my idea into English was indescribably enjoyable. What I made myself was something I wanted to accomplish, and this will make my English better. That was really fun!*11

In these statements, the attitudinal changes of the students were seen. They seem to realize they

are learning for their own purposes.

What the learning of the discourse of the English language teaches students:

> In writing I have just written down as I thought of, but I learned that English had rules of paragraphs. I also learned there were linking words between the paragraphs. I would like to try what I learned.[*12]

> ...The class was interesting because the ways of reading were taught. Those were where the author's points were, what the author's points were and they were clearly understood...[*13]

The classes should be innovative for them in any sense. The newness of the aspects of the teaching was pointed out by 66 (20%) descriptions as important (See Table II).
The recognition of the process oriented approach by students:

> ...In this approach, for the same goal, we learn English in different ways. I think in this method, those who don't like English lessons will love English learning.[*14]

Many students showed the positive attitude toward the task-based approach. If teachers' aim is to teach grammar. There are various ways to realize it.[*15]

The overall impression of the course described by a student:

> Looking back the course:
> This class was simply enjoyable as compared with the classes where I have learned English. In those classes students were required to memorize vocabularies, grammar, and its drilling. This was just a repetition of listening to a lecture and memorizing the contents. In this class, however, new ideas such as how to communicate and how to write a paper in English were the teaching contents. I basically don't like simple mechanical repetitions, but love reading books understanding the contents deeply, thinking about the matter in question and write about it in my words. In this class, I was motivated by the task of writing my own opinion about the theme that was of my own choice. The other factor of my motivation is the instructor's personality. He was always with the students never putting on airs. People will never betray whom s/he respects. I was glad to meet you as such a personality.[*16]

These are the comments by the students written originally in Japanese:
*1   Richards et al ,1986 described the method as "the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has
       no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory..." The Audio-lingual Approach has both the linguistic
       and the learning theory (ibid.), though the situation that the approach showed some results was a lot different
       from the students in this research The students in question should first be motivated to learn anyway Another

criticism about the Audiolingualism is in its view about a language. The naturalists points out the lack of the idea of the creativity of the human language in Audiolingualism.

*2　H.Tanabe, 1998. In what sense the course was humanistic ? Humanistic Approach is defined in Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics as "(in a language teaching) a term sometimes used for what underlies METHODS in which the following principles are considered important: (a) the development of human values (b) grows in self-awareness and in the understanding of others (c) sensitivity to human feelings and emotions (d) active students involvement in learning takes place (for this last reason such methods are also said STUDENT CENTERED). The SILENTWAY and COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING are examples of "humanistic approaches". In the method in this research, the students were treated as an information processor with their emotion as well as their intellect, but not as a machine translator or a language repeating machine. For example, the first half of the syllabus was for the students' understanding of the meaning of learning at a university, English as a language for human communication, and the rational for the English learning method taken in the course The second half was for the knowledge and the experience of expressing their opinions, feelings or whatever they really wanted.

*3　Noriyuki Yamaguchi Trans.,

*4　Kimihiro Sato. Trans.,

*5　Masahiro Uehara. Trans.,

*6　Kohei Yamaguchi. Trans.,

*7　Hiroshi Kikuchi. Trans.,

*8　Hiroyasu Shirafuji. Trans.,

*9　Hideki Yamamoto. Trans.,

*10　Hideaki Iwao. Trans ,

*11　Kunihiko Ichihara Trans.,

*12　Toshiyuki Kawamoto. Trans.,

*13　Nobuharu Ishii. Trans.,

*14　Rie Sato. Trans.,

*15　The rational for the task-based approach see Krashen, 1983., etc.

*16　Nakao Horii. Trans. This student seems to have understood the heart of the course. His description allows the interpretation of the humanistic approach as a means to self-actualization by the student-self. English learning with his own purpose, following his learning schedule, readings for the purpose and the writing experience, those are in the self-actualization process of his life.

Conclusion

To summarize the comments by the students the following factors for students' motivation will come out:

1) Providing students with techniques, strategies and knowledge so that they can try them inside and outside of their classroom. In this research those were;

(a) The discourse knowledge of the English Language Provided the knowledge they can try to improve their writing. Many students know the importance of mechanical aspects of writing in English grammar, and the improvement in the discourse level will make them realize another aspect of their growth. What they learned become something worth trying for them.

(b) Linking words

Linking words or semantic markers (c.f. Wallace, 1987) help students to organize their paragraphs. This might remove a psychological barrier of students for longer writings.

(c) The use of computers

The first year students at this time have little or no experience in writing a paper in English on a computer. The use of word processors, spell checkers, grammar checkers, etc. themselves can be strong motives for learning.

(d) A view about a language not for learning but for the communicative use

For the students, English is a set of the grammar and the pronunciation rules which should always be perfect under the observation by the teachers. Many students in this research described that was the first experience they wrote for the real communication. It seems to be an innovative idea for students who have learned English for entrance examinations to use English for communicative purposes.

2) The use of the features of the Humanistic Approach in the classroom

Allow students freer choices of planning their learning, freer choices of topics for their writings, freer choices of reading materials, and freer choice of presenting a paper. They will have experiences of expressing their ideas by their own means and will have a responsibility for all the learning processes they go through in and outside of their classes.

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