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The Concept and Development of Program C in the Seigakuin English Program

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Introduction

Program C, the Intermediate Low level of the new Seigakuin English Program (SEP), is aimed at students who have a modicum of English language ability. It is hoped that, by the end of the course (two semesters for all departments except for the Japanese Literature Department, which has only semester), students will be able to handle successfully a number of interactive, task-oriented and social situations. They should be able to ask and answer questions, initiate and respond to simple statements and maintain face-to-face conversation, albeit in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy. Within these limitations, the students should be able to perform such tasks as introducing themselves, ordering a meal, asking directions, and making purchases. It is hoped their English vocabulary will be expanded enough to express at least elementary needs, although initially strong interference from their native language may occur. They should be able to be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.

Speaking, listening, reading and writing skills will all be emphasized. Examples of reading which students should be able to accomplish include the reading and understanding of messages with social purposes or information intended for a wide audience, such as public announcements and short, straightforward instructions dealing with public life. Students should also be able to write short messages, postcards, and simple notes, such as telephone messages.

In practice this will mean that students will be able to

exchange greetings and have a simple conversation with native speakers on campus and to be able to survive in the most common situations in an English-speaking environment, such as when traveling abroad. Since various overseas programs are available to Seigakuin students, those students who participate in them will be able to practice their skills in genuine environments and realize the viability of what they have learned. Even students who do not travel overseas should find their skills useful in accomplishing simple tasks that they may be called upon to perform in future employment.

Students will be placed at the Intermediate Low level (as they will be for the Intermediate High and Mid levels) according to their results on the placement test that they will take at the beginning of the spring semester. The placement test being used is the Secondary Level English Proficiency (SLEP) Test, the scores of which can be correlated with TOEFL Test scores. Some teachers have expressed their concern that students placed in the Intermediate Low level will be dismayed at being in the lowest level and lose their motivation. To counteract this, students will be clearly told that, if they study hard and try to do well on their tests, they will have the chance to move up into a higher level.

Needs Analysis

Under the auspices of the Seigakuin University General Research Institute, the English Education Research Committee conducted a survey of the English program at Seigakuin University and Joshi Seigakuin Junior College for the purpose of determining student needs and how those needs could be better fulfilled, in January 1995. Most students' primary reasons for studying English were to speak to foreigners and to travel/study abroad. Many of the students expressed a desire to have more speaking in their classes and an increase in the number of hours

of English instruction. Speaking English is seen as the most important of the four skills to be taught (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing).

Students also are interested in taking English tests : primarily STEP, TOEFL and TOEIC. Junior college students who wish to transfer to Lynchburg College in Virginia, one of the sister colleges, need at least 500 points on the TOEFL Test to gain admission. As for the STEP Test, J.D. Brown and other guest professors at the annual JALT conference in Nagoya in 1995 expressed reservations about its reliability. Nevertheless, since so many companies which employ students after graduation place great emphasis on STEP scores, a practice STEP Pre-level 2 Test will be offered campus-wide during finals week at the end of the spring semester for any student who may be interested in taking it, and a practice STEP Level 2 Test will be offered during finals week at the end of the fall semester.

These student needs have all been taken into consideration in creating the Seigakuin English Program, and students will continue to be consulted in the future so that improvements can continually be made. Student evaluation sheets will be passed out to students at the end of each semester so that the feedback from them can be used to improve the curriculum.

Goals and Objectives

To help students answer their needs, their level of English language proficiency has to be improved. How is such proficiency defined and measured? For the Seigakuin English Program, the decision was made to use levels of proficiency established by the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL). ACTFL workshops have been conducted at the Seigakuin/Joshi Seigakuin campus at which teachers have learned how to conduct oral interviews of students to determine their levels of proficiency. While these proficiency levels cannot be

goals in and of themselves, they can be used to extract goals : the tasks which a person at the intermediate low level of proficiency can handle are the tasks which students in Program C will be expected to learn how to do.

What is the difference between “goals” and “objectives”? A good question, and one which many teachers have had come to grips with in attempting to put into words what they are trying to accomplish in developing a new curriculum : “the intolerable wrestle with words and meanings,” as T.S. Eliot phrased it in *Four Quartets*. J.D. Brown has stated the difference between goals and objectives very clearly in his invaluable book, *The Elements of Language Curriculum : A Systematic Approach to Program Development* (Brown, 1995). He says,

A logical outcome of determining the needs of a group of language students is the specification of goals, that is, general statements about what must be accomplished in order to attain and satisfy students’ needs. If, for instance, a group of Japanese students were doing English as a foreign language training in order to prepare for study at American universities, one goal might be to prepare them to be able to write term papers. Producing such papers is one language-related task that students might need once they start their studies in the United States, and this task can be expressed as a goal. *Objectives*, on the other hand, are precise statements about what content or skills the students must master in order to attain a particular goal. For instance, to write a term paper, the students might first need to develop several essential library skills. One such skill would be the ability to find a book in the library....Since the difference between goals and objectives clearly hinges on level of specificity, the dividing line between the two is not always clear. Nonetheless, the distinction will prove useful in planning and maintaining language programs. In fact, any discussion in a

program about how to meet and satisfy students' language needs can only be as clear and precise as the objectives that result.

(Brown, 1995, p. 21)

Therefore, in creating the SEP, the teachers have tried to state the objectives for each level of the program as clearly as possible. Some of the objectives for Program C have already been stated in the introduction to this paper. Further, more specific objectives can be seen in the syllabus for Program C which will follow. And, as Brown says on page 72 of the above-mentioned book, "Goals should never be viewed as permanent, that is, they should never become set in cement." As student evaluations are received, as teachers attempt to improve the SEP, and as Japanese society changes, the goals and objectives will be modified to meet the needs of the students.

Testing

Since the goals of the SEP have been derived from the ACTFL levels of proficiency, it follows that testing of our students' proficiency at each level, at the end of a semester, will be similar to the oral testing which ACTFL does to determine the level of proficiency. An ACTFL oral test/interview usually lasts about 15 minutes, and may last longer. Often the test is given by one tester to one person being tested. The interview is taped so that the tester can check the initial judgment of the interviewee against the tape, and the tape can be given back to the person being tested for his or her own use. Such testing is very demanding for both the tester and the person being tested and, of course a great amount of time is needed to conduct such interviews.

There will be a great many students in the SEP and the time necessary to test them will be limited. Therefore, an alternative method of testing students is to have two students perform a role play based on the material covered in class (e.g., one student

might ask another student to have dinner with him or her, and would have to tell that student three or four things the other student has to know) while the teacher observes. Such a role play could take only about five minutes. This would save wear and tear on both teachers and students and also save time.

This kind of oral testing can be called a "prochievement test," a combination of proficiency and achievement. An achievement test tests what has been taught from limited material. It can be studied for, and is "norm-referenced": i.e., it is a test in which general language abilities are measured and in which a student's performance is compared with that of all other students (For a more detailed explanation of what norm-referenced tests are, and how they differ from "criterion-referenced tests," please see chapter 2 of *Language Testing in Japan* (Brown and Yamashita, 1995)). An achievement test tests students to see if they have achieved what their teachers hope they will achieve. Achievement tests are administered often.

A "proficiency test" tests what a person can or cannot do with language. The material is unlimited, and a student can practice for it, if not study for it. It is a "criterion-referenced" test: i.e., it attempts to determine the amount of material learned; specific language points are measured; and a student's performance is compared only to a pre-specified learning objective. Examples of proficiency tests are a driver's test, a pilot's test, etc. Proficiency tests are administered after major intervals, since proficiency is built up slowly and cannot be achieved overnight.

A "prochievement test" attempts to test what students are taught in a realistic context to see if students can actually use what teachers have been teaching them. It simulates "real-life" usage, and measures progress towards defined levels of proficiency, such as the ACTFL levels of proficiency. Students can combine study and practice to do better on prochievement tests.

How to measure a student's achievement/proficiency is a

difficult question. A possible method of scoring is to divide grading into five categories: 1) overall comprehensibility; 2) vocabulary; 3) grammatical accuracy; 4) fluency; and 5) listening comprehension. A certain number of points could be given for each category, with a total score of 100. Refining such categories and grading exactly and accurately need to be carefully considered, but to go into them here is beyond the scope of this paper, which can only be general in its description of Program C.

There are other oral testing techniques which could also be employed, such as using a picture or picture story which learners must describe and speak freely about ; having learners give instructions, a description or an explanation of some process or on some topic ; checking to see if students can make appropriate responses in everyday situations using such language skills as apologizing, accepting/refusing an invitation politely, giving information, and so on. The variety of testing techniques and how to intelligently employ them is a task both daunting and challenging for the language teacher.

As well as oral tests, the SEP will also use vocabulary tests. Evert Osburn of the Seigakuin Language Institute has done an outstanding job of collating lists of the highest frequency words in spoken English from several leading English dictionaries to create *the SEP Master Vocabulary List* for all three levels of the SEP. One aim of Program C is to see that students are familiar with the 2,000 highest frequency words in spoken English. These words will be learned within the context of the subject matter of the course. Because of the limited amount of class time, students will be expected to learn much of their vocabulary outside of class, as homework, using vocabulary worksheets, games, puzzles, etc., prepared by the teachers. The teachers in the SEP program have found two books to be invaluable as resource material in this regard : *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* (Nation, 1990) and *New Ways in Teaching Vocabulary* (Nation,

1994).

In addition to the above tests, there will be a pre-test/post-test. A pre-test is given to students at the beginning of a course "to determine the abilities of the students at entry...pre-tests are designed either to measure the overall language proficiency of students or to diagnose their specific weaknesses" (Brown, p. 44). The post-test is the same as the pre-test, and if the pre-test/post-test is a good one, ideally, "At the end of the course, when the students had the benefit of instruction and took the post-test, they would probably score very high..." ("Criterion-Referenced Test Construction and Evaluation" by Dale Griffiee, in *Language Testing in Japan*).

Syllabus Design

Many English courses in Japan seem to center around a chosen textbook. In the SEP courses, however, the courses focus on the oral and vocabulary testing which the students will undergo. The textbooks are a means to an end, not ends in themselves. Moreover, there is no perfect textbook, which means that each teacher will bring in outside material or extra resources in order to prepare the students for the tests. Eventually the SEP teachers hope to write their own text, based upon the needs of the program, and to keep updating and revising that text as needed.

In fact, choosing textbooks at all for the SEP was partly political: in order to get the program accepted and passed through committees, some sort of textbooks had to be displayed and approved. It was felt by the teachers involved in designing the SEP program that at least three textbooks should be chosen for each of the three levels of the program, so that each teacher could choose a textbook which he or she felt confident in using. To choose only one textbook and have all teachers use it is to straitjacket teachers: every teacher has her or his own style of

teaching, his or her personal choice of materials that work and materials that don't. The unity of the SEP lies in the goals, the objectives, and the common testing. It is hoped that the range of textbooks which can be used in the program will be extended next year to any textbook which the group of SEP teachers agree is a viable textbook, not just the three textbooks designated for each level this year.

The syllabuses for each of the three levels are topical and functional : they use topics which the students will probably be concerned with in everyday situations outside of class and ask the students to become able to perform language functions necessary in such situations. The syllabuses for Program C can be founded in the Appendix.

Materials

The textbooks for Program C have been discussed in the above section on syllabus design; and there are many other materials which teachers may choose to bring in: pairwork exercises or games from various textbooks such as the *Pairwork A* and *B* books published by Penguin, *Talkativities*, *Great Ideas*, etc.; rhythm and intonation exercises from such books as *Jazz Chants*; various cassette tapes such as the ones used with the *Listen For It* textbook and the imaginative *Sounds Intriguing* tape; videos such as *A Weekend by the Sea*, *The Lost Secret*, etc.; videotapes of scenes from famous films or personal videotapes which the teacher feels would contribute to classroom learning ; CD-ROMs and e-mail ; etc. Every teacher can recommend some such resource that has worked for her or him. There are also such examples of realia as menus, family photographs, actual film and television schedules, sales catalogs, etc. A problem most teachers seem to have is not what to put in, but what to leave out, deciding what is essential and discarding what there is no time for, no matter how good it may be.

Ideally, the teachers should create their own texts and pool their own resource materials particularly tailored to meet the needs of the students in Program C. This may take years to accomplish, and is a continual, ongoing process, but is well worth the effort.

Let us not forget that teachers themselves are the greatest resource of all. They have a wealth of knowledge and information to pass on to students, and they represent cultural values (as well as their own personal values) which students need to be familiar with. (It goes without saying that teachers need to be aware of and respect their students' cultural backgrounds and personal values as well.) Learning a language means not only learning words and memorizing phrases; it also means being willing to entertain new ideas and explore new territory. In the SEP there are teachers of various nationalities and backgrounds; each one brings his or her own life experiences to bear on the task at hand, and that is something no mere textbook or computer program can ever replace.

Conclusion

Many things remain to be done. For one thing, future needs analysis studies should include teachers and administrators as well as students. New technology such as the Internet and e-mail will have to be introduced. New texts will have to be written and testing will have to be refined. The SEP will have to be extended to second-year students at the junior college and should later include the Speed Reading classes for first-year junior college students as well.

It is not only language skills that will have to be worked upon, but attitudes as well. Isolationism is a thing of the past. Internationalization must cease to be merely a buzzword and instead become a reality. Language is a means of achieving internationalization. It is a bridge that spans nations and links people

together, and it can be a powerful force for peace between nations. But it is a frail bridge, and demands care. It needs to be strengthened with girders of mutual trust and respect. Teachers must constantly remind themselves of this and impart it to students as well. If the SEP can achieve this goal, as well as its others, it will have more than proved its worth.

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Appendix

S.E.P. Program C: Intermediate Low Spring Semester Syllabus

Textbooks : One of the following three textbooks will be used as the main text.

1. *New Person to Person I*, by Jack Richards, et al. (Oxford University Press)
2. *Interchange Intro*, by Jack Richards (Cambridge University Press)
3. *First Impact*, by Rod Ellis, Greta Gorsuch, et al. (Longman Asia ELT)

Dictionary : *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 3rd Edition ; Compact Version (Longman Co., Ltd.)

Class Topics	Functions
1 Greetings ; Classroom English; Introduction of Class Policy; <i>Vocabulary and Program C Pre-test</i>	Greeting people; asking questions related to the English classroom
2 Introductions; Personal Biographical Information; Leave-takings	Introducing oneself ; asking for giving information about self, such as address, phone number, hobbies, etc. ; saying good-bye
3 Introductions; Personal Biographical Information; Leave-takings, cont.	Same as above, including verification of spelling; filling out forms with personal information
4 Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling 1-3	
5 Work/School	Asking for and giving information about where people work, go to school, etc.
6 Family	Talking about family relationships, describing family members
7 Family, cont.	Same as above
8 Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 5-7	
9 Preferences	Expressing likes, dislikes, and favorites
10 Preferences, cont.	Same as above
11 Times and Dates	Asking and giving the time; using days of the week, months, specific dates

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| 12 | Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling
9-11 | |
| 13 | MIDTERM EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test) | |
| 14 | Schedules | Asking for and giving information about schedules, especially those involving entertainment and transportation |
| 15 | Leisure Activities and Daily Routines | Asking for and giving information about leisure activities and daily routines |
| 16 | Leisure Activities and Daily Routines, cont. | Same as above |
| 17 | Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling
14-16 | |
| 18 | Numbers (up to million), Money, and Prices | Recognizing and using numbers ; dealing with money |
| 19 | Shopping | Asking about prices and buying things in a store ; asking for help |
| 20 | Shopping, cont. | Same as above |
| 21 | Consolidation ; listening and speaking activities recycling
18-20 | |
| 22 | Restaurants | Ordering a meal in a restaurant ; giving cooking preferences |
| 23 | Reservations | Making reservations (restaurant, hotel, ticket) |
| 24 | Invitations | Offering, accepting, and refusing invitations; dating |

25 Consolidation : listening and speaking activities recycling
22-24

(Japanese Literature majors only: *Vocabulary and Program C Post-test*)

(26) FINAL EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)

[Special Option : STEP Pre-Level 2 Test*]

* A practice STEP Pre-level 2 Test will be offered campus-wide during finals week for any SEP student who may be interested in it.

**SEP Program C: Intermediate Low
Fall Semester Syllabus**

Class	Topics	Functions
1	Vacations and Travel	Asking for and giving information about vacations/travel experiences
2	Vacations and Travel, cont.	Same as above
3	Transportation	Describing ways to get around in the city
4	Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 1-3	
5	Locations and Directions	Talking about where one lives
6	Locations and Directions, cont.	Asking for and giving locations and directions
7	Living Quarters	Describing homes
8	Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 5-7	
9	People: Clothes	Describing what people are wearing and what one likes to wear
10	People: Appearances	Describing people's physical characteristics

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| 11 | Requests and Favors | Making small/large requests ; asking favors |
| 12 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 9-11 | |
| 13 | MIDTERM EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test) | |
| 14 | Abilities | Asking and giving information about abilities and in-abilities |
| 15 | Comparisons | Comparing people, places and thing |
| 16 | Comparisons, cont. | Same as above |
| 17 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 14-16 | |
| 18 | Health | Talking about the body and describing health problems |
| 19 | Personal History | Talking about one's past history, such as childhood memories, school life, work experience, etc. |
| 20 | Personal History, cont. | Same as above |
| 21 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 18-20 | |
| 22 | Opinions | Asking about and giving opinions |
| 23 | Future Plans and Dreams | Talking about future plans and dreams |
| 24 | Future Plans and Dreams, cont. | Same as above |
| 25 | Consolidation: listening and speaking activities recycling 22-24; <i>Vocabulary and Program C Post-test</i> | |

(26) FINAL EXAMINATION (Oral Prochievement Test)

[**Special Option** : STEP Level 2 Test*]

*A practice STEP Level 2 Test will be offered campus-wide

during finals week for any SEP student who may be interested in it.