

Language Training for EFL Teaching at the University of Toronto: Approaches and Teacher Roles

トロント大学におけるEFL教授のための言語研修 —アプローチと指導者の役割—

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Abstract

Today, Japanese teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) are involved in a large scale of educational reform. They are expected to develop their professional competence and autonomy by the Japan Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology (MEXT), which encourages them to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their classes. This paper focuses on language training for EFL teaching at the University Toronto, and aims to examine how an instructor of the course (Instructor X) implemented CLT and what roles she played in the course. Sasaki, one of the authors, participated in the course as a student. We analyzed a variety of data, such as Sasaki's observations/reflections, learning/teaching materials, Instructor X's teaching methods, the syllabus of the course, and the results of the questionnaires administered to the students and Instructor X. We recognized Instructor X's teaching principles and her effective approaches to the course, and considered some pedagogical implications for EFL teacher education in Japan. A teacher education course will be the product of the designers' and deliverers' educational philosophy.

Key words: EFL teacher education, CLT, teacher roles, communicative competence, autonomy

1. Introduction

The action plan for cultivating “Japanese with English Abilities” was proposed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in 2003. This action plan aims to promote innovation in English language teaching (ELT) in order to develop Japanese people's English abilities in the global community. Japanese teachers of English are encouraged to implement CLT in the learner-centered communicative classroom and to promote their continuing professional development as lifelong learners. Teachers should not accept uncritically the methods presented in education courses and in the literature, but should select from and adapt these in an informed way in order to develop an appropriate methodology for their own local context. Taking the above into consideration, we need to identify issues in the design of EFL teacher education courses, and to consider their theoretical and practical contents and the methodology for delivering them.

The University of Toronto, which has been one of the oldest and best universities in Canada, was established in 1827. The University of Toronto's School of Continuing Studies has offered continuing education part-time courses and certificates. It has been providing language instruction to non-native

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speakers for almost fifty years. Language Training for EFL Teaching (LT-EFLT), which we focused in the present study, is one of the courses (see Appendix II). It is designed for high-intermediate or advanced students who are pre- and in-service EFL teachers in their home countries. Students in LT-EFLT are encouraged to learn about the theory and practice of CLT and to develop their own communicative competence in English and autonomy in EFL learning and teaching.

This study examined how Instructor X implemented CLT, what roles she played in the course, and her own or the students' reflection on the course. We aimed to reveal effective ways to use CLT and teacher roles in EFL instruction, and to explore pedagogical implications for pre- and in-service EFL teacher education in Japan.

2. Method

2.1. Purpose

In this study on LT-EFLT, we aimed to examine Instructor X's effective implementation of CLT and her teacher roles in the course, and to consider pedagogical implications for pre- and in-service EFL teacher education in Japan.

The research questions were:

- (1) What kinds of approaches did Instructor X implement in the course?
- (2) What kinds of roles did Instructor X play in the course?

2.2. Participants

The participants in this study were Instructor X, who conducted LT-EFLT, and 6 students (including Sasaki) who took part in the program. Instructor X was born and raised in Toronto, and her mother tongue was English. She had been in charge of L-EFLT for 16 years. Her credit was established by the School of Continuing Studies Excellence in Teaching Award, which gave the highest honor to those instructors who epitomized the School's commitment to learner-focused education. All the students were non-native English-speaking people: 5 students from Asia (Japan, Korea, Taiwan), and 1 from South America (Columbia). They were different in age, educational background, occupation, and proficiency of English, but all of them were interested in teaching English and some of them had already taught English in their home countries or Canada.

2.3. Materials

In order to address the overarching objectives of this study; that is, to examine Instructor X's effective use of CLT and her roles in the course, we employed two kinds of questionnaires: Questionnaire on LT-EFLT (Instructor X) and Questionnaire on LT-EFLT (Students) (see Appendix I). In addition to the results of the questionnaires, we analyzed the following data: Sasaki's observations/reflections on the program, teaching materials, and the syllabus of LT-EFLT. By making maximal use of these materials, we could perhaps stimulate complexity and subtlety of insight and overcome any problems of bias.

2.4. Procedures

While participating in the program as a student, Sasaki carried out her class observation for 196 hours from July 9th through September 14th in 2007. After LT-EFLT finished, she wrote up her observations. As soon as she came back to Japan, Kojima and Sasaki discussed and made up the questionnaires and sent them to the individual participants by e-mail with the informed consent process in November. All of the participants' answers were sent back by the beginning of December. In face-to-

face discussion, the authors analyzed them and all the other materials.

3. Results and Discussion

First, we analyzed the features of Instructor X's CLT, which must have been the primary approach to LT-EFLT. Second, we focused on the other approach, an analytical and autonomous approach. Finally, we analyzed Instructor X's roles in the course.

3.1. Communicative Language Teaching

(1) Theory of language

Instructor X suggested that English was a means of real communication. The primary goal of the class was "to improve overall understanding of how to use the English language" (Instructor X, 2007). This might imply that Instructor X expected the trainees to engage in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of English for meaningful purposes.

(2) Theory of learning

Since CLT became a main approach to LT-EFLT, Instructor X seemed to take it for granted that the students learn English through communicative activities. Student A commented:

My instructor gave us a lot of opportunities to communicate with each other through various activities in every class and to do after-class activities, such as cooking, eating out for lunch, and going to cinemas. These activities provided me chances to spontaneously communicate with others in real life, and I was really encouraged to improve my practical English. (Student A)

(3) Objectives

Instructor X suggested two main objectives of LT-EFLT while taking the participants' needs into consideration as a teacher trainer: to improve overall understanding of how to use English and to explore effective methods and techniques to teach English. She emphasized the integration of language skills and focused on all of the components of communicative competence: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, or strategic competence. Moreover, she explored effective methods and techniques as the students, who were teacher-learners, needed to learn how to teach in the future classroom. Student B answered the question: Why did you take the course?

I needed to soak up skills required to EFL teachers. Thanks to micro-teaching, I recognized that it was important for teachers to interact with students and to keep students working on tasks in class, so that they could keep paying their attention to class. (Student B)

Most of the students pointed out the effectiveness of the course which met their needs.

(4) Syllabus

In the syllabus of LT-EFLT, the following nine heads were presented: course outline, content & special topics, attendance, participation, assignments, observation, teaching practice, and course materials. They are briefly summarized as follows:

Course outline	The program provides students with various opportunities to learn about the theory and practice of CLT, to help them to develop their own communicative competence, and to review teaching methodology.
Content & special topics	Subject content includes an overview of current teaching and learning theories. Special features are: individual speaking/pronunciation diagnostic, Practice Interview Program, teaching observations, peer-teaching practice, workshop on using the Internet for teaching English, etc.
Attendance	It is important for participants to attend all their classes on time.
Participation	Students are required to participate positively and actively.
Assignments	Students receive regular homework, optional work and special assignments.
Observation	Students have three or four opportunities to observe classes.
Teaching practice	Students have two types of teaching practice: teaching practice in class and assisting the <i>Focus on Speaking</i> coffee chat activities.
Course materials	Jeremy Harmer's <i>How to teach English</i> , Penny Ur's <i>A Course in Language Teaching</i> , etc.

(5) Activities

Instructor X provided a wide variety of tasks or activities for individual, pair, group, or whole class work. In the group activities, the students could have more opportunities to interact for meaningful purposes than in the whole class activities. As for authentic activities for real communication, Instructor X mentioned:

I find it useful to engage in real tasks, whether they be creating an activity for microteaching or preparing a meal together with classmates. These tasks engage students in true communication.
(Instructor X)

Micro-teaching required the students to communicate for teaching, and this helped them to develop their real communication skills.

Regarding grammatical errors in interaction, Instructor X remarked:

If the error is causing a communication breakdown, or if the error is going to cause harm or embarrassment, I try to correct it immediately. Otherwise, I try to correct common errors together after an activity (I often write them down on the board) or I prepare a mini-lesson for the following class. (Instructor X)

Instructor X seemed to emphasize not only fluency but also accuracy for meaningful purposes.

(6) Materials

Instructor X regarded the role of materials as promoting the students' communicative language use. She used a variety of task-based materials, such as role plays, simulations, and problem-solving, which helped the students to use English for communication in real life. Moreover, she liked "to encourage students to recreate tasks and activities—to make their own versions of tasks, so they relearn the materials" (Instructor X, 2007). The students created tasks containing grammatical rules which they had already learned in the course, and interacted to solve problems by using their acquired knowledge.

Regarding teaching resources, Instructor X claimed:

I try to stay current with both text and Internet resources, and I encourage students to become

familiar with them as well. I like to let students know where the materials come from, so I try to acknowledge books and websites I'm using. I think this also helps students stay in touch with English when the class is over—I hope I encourage independent learning. (Instructor X)

She provided the students with authentic materials full of real communication for meaningful purposes, and promoted their autonomous language learning by using the Internet resources.

3.2. Analytical and autonomous approach

Instructor X implemented an analytical and autonomous approach in the program. It was important for us to analyze the approach to understand her philosophy of teaching. Instructor X referred to her analytical approach:

I try to take an analytical approach to studying English. I encourage learners to think about the systems that exist, and to think about what their own strengths and challenges are for English. I also try to help students become better at learning more on their own. I hope that students feel more knowledgeable about resources for continuing their studies when they have left the class. (Instructor X)

Developing learner autonomy requires conscious awareness of learning process, self-reflection, and decision-making. Instructor X's approach encouraged the students to develop their metacognitive abilities, which could help them to promote their autonomy. She stated:

I like to start from the basics and give students the language they need. This allows them to continue their own learning outside the classroom. By being able to identify problems, students can then find answers and explanations on their own. (Instructor X)

She encouraged the trainees to continue their learning/teaching by analytically thinking about the language and their learning/teaching process.

As one of the examples of her analytical and autonomous approach, Instructor X encouraged the students to write reflective journals. They wrote about what they were interested in during LT-EFLT, what they did after school with their friends, or what problems they had in their learning/teaching. Whenever they submitted their journals to her, she returned them with error corrections in grammar or expressions, plus her private comments on the contents. Reflective journals were an effective strategy to foster the students' communicative language use for meaningful purposes, to reflect on their daily lives, and to form a good human relationship between Instructor X and her students.

3.3. Instructor X's roles in the course

We analyzed the roles played by Instructor X in light of information-gatherer, decision-maker, motivator, facilitator of group dynamics, provider of authentic English, counselor, provider of feedback, and promoter of multicultural perspective.

(1) Information-gatherer

In order to respond to the students' ever-changing needs in LT-EFLT, Instructor X constantly gathered information about the students, analyzed their language behaviors, and observed their ongoing interactions. While the students were interacting in communicative activities, Instructor X monitored their interaction and recorded in notes. She also observed her students while interacting with them. She mentioned:

One sign that lets me know that I've been somewhat successful in the class is when students come to me with a variety of questions about things they've heard or read in English. That lets me know that they are thinking about English is an analytical way-trying to figure out things that

are important to them. (Instructor X)

Through reflective journals, Instructor X collected information about individual students. She could analyze their English writing and understood their ideas about language learning/teaching.

(2) Decision-maker

Instructor X made decisions on a moment to moment basis. She responded sensitively to the students of different language ability levels and varying backgrounds and needs. Taking their primary needs into consideration, she decided the objectives of the program and her teaching materials/procedures. Student C commented:

I would like to have an opportunity to teach English in my home country. I learned some techniques to encourage students to learn autonomously and to make my class interesting.
(Student C)

While providing necessary linguistic and emotional supports, Instructor X encouraged the students to learn at their own pace.

I always have different levels of proficiency in my class, but I don't mind. If teachers plan carefully, they can provide ways to learn at their own pace. (Instructor X)

(3) Motivator

Instructor X motivated the students to promote their positive attitudes towards communication in English. She provided stimulating and authentic activities that motivated that responded to the emotional, cognitive, and linguistic needs of the students. She referred to journal writing:

I think journal writing can help many students establish a bond with the teacher. Often students who are quiet in a group find journals a comfortable way to express themselves and their ideas. Journals also help the teacher really get to know the students as a person, not just a student.
(Instructor X)

The deeper the relationship between the students and Instructor X became, the more spontaneously they talked to Instructor X. Journal writing allowed her to access the students' needs, interests, and goals for communication.

(4) Facilitator of group dynamics

Instructor X had strong skills in group dynamics which helped the students to learn interactively in the program. She encouraged the trainees to develop their communicative competence and autonomy by learning interdependently among the participants who had different levels of proficiency. As for the class size, she claimed:

Twelve is my perfect number—but I know that is not really common—most classes are much larger. You need enough bodies for critical mass so that you can change the groupings. (Instructor X)

She suggested that teachers should understand how to use different types of grouping to encourage specific types of learning in larger classes.

(5) Provider of authentic English

Instructor X provided the students with extensive exposure to English through readings, lectures, movies, films, and audiotapes. She also gave them rich opportunities to encounter a variety of native speakers by inviting guest speakers and arranging field trips for the students. Student D commented on Instructor X's study-aid materials:

Thank to these authentic materials, I got the habit of studying by myself. Also, because these materials consisted of lots of keys to practical communication skills, they were really useful. (Student D)

Various teaching materials of hers allowed the students to learn authentic English.

(6) Counselor

Instructor X helped the students to feel secure and confident about their learning/teaching. She recognized psychological problems that might hinder the development of her students' communicative competence and autonomy, and helped them to overcome these problems. Student E thanked her for her advice:

She advised me that I did not have to be afraid of making mistakes in conversation. Her advice encouraged me to speak English more fluently. (Student E)

In Student E's country, most of her EFL teachers used the Grammar Translation Method and emphasized accuracy rather than fluency in communication. Instructor X encouraged Student E to be a good risk-taker through counseling.

(7) Provider of feedback

Instructor X monitored the students' learning progress regularly. The feedback that she provided was timely and constructive. In particular, she gave them feedback on their journals. Her feedback was often focused on grammatical errors which the students needed to alter for meaningful communication. The students valued the incentives that she regularly provided.

(8) Promoter of a multicultural perspective

It was quite natural for the students to feel cultural conflicts as they were from various countries or regions. Instructor X made efforts to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere. She remarked:

Creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere is fundamental for me. Typically in my classes, I have students from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of proficiency, but students can always contribute and shine in some unique way. I am always amazed and surprised by the interesting ways that each student can contribute to a class. (Trainer X)

Instructor X encouraged the students to promote interdependent learning. She always divided the participants into a few groups which usually consisted of people of different nationalities. Through intercultural communication in the cooperative groups, the students' multi-cultural understanding and sociolinguistic competence were promoted.

4. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications for EFL Teacher Education in Japan

In this paper, we have examined the program of LT-EFLT. The research questions were: (1) What kinds of approaches did Instructor X implement in the course? (2) What kinds of roles did Instructor X play in the course? The answers to the questions were summarized as follows:

(1) *What kinds of approaches did Instructor X implement in the course?*

Instructor X's main approach to LT-EFLT was CLT. She expected the students to learn and teach English as a means of communicating for meaningful purposes and to develop their communicative competence and autonomy. We analyzed her CLT in light of theory of language, theory of learning, objectives, syllabus, activities, and materials. As a result, her instruction was focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of the communicative competence.

She intertwined the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic. She regarded fluency and accuracy as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques, although at times fluency was more emphasized to keep the trainees meaningfully engaged in language use.

In addition to CLT, Instructor X implemented an analytical and autonomous approach. She encouraged the students to think about their own strengths/challenges and their study resources for lifelong learning. They were given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning. The student journal was partially intended to help Instructor X to obtain various types of information about individual students' progress in their learning, and it was thought that the journal might enable the students to develop their autonomy through self-reflection.

(2) *What kinds of roles did Instructor X play in the course?*

Regarding Instructor X's roles, we analyzed them in light of information-gatherer, decision-maker, motivator, facilitator of group dynamics, provider of authentic English, counselor, provider of feedback, and promoter of a multicultural perspective. In the student-centered communicative classroom, the role of the trainer was that of facilitator, not an all-knowing bestower of knowledge. There was always ongoing dialogue between Instructor X and her students. Trust between them was likely to be a key factor to success.

Owing to the small amount of data collected, the limited number of the participants, and the specific target of Instructor X, it might be difficult to generalize the results of our data analysis. The results could be affected by complex cultural, ideological, political, administrative, institutional, and language planning factors. Thus, it might be too optimistic to suppose that in Japan we will be able to implement Instructor X's approaches in every teacher education course without any problems.

However, it is worthwhile considering some pedagogical implications for teacher education in Japan. Designing an EFL teacher education course has many parallels with designing an English language training course, but is complicated by the fact that it is higher in the stack. As Instructor X did, we must consider the relationship between theory and practice in both language and pedagogy. We have options in terms of selecting the course content (the information, skills or knowledge to be taught or learned), and also have options in terms of process (how the information or knowledge is going to be taught or learned). Teacher education courses and teacher educators are seen to be sources of knowledge, experience, and resources for teacher educators to use in exploring and developing their own approach to teaching. As Instructor X's approaches suggested, teacher educators are expected to try their own philosophies and theories precisely in order to improve the quality of teacher education courses.

Judging from Teacher X's roles in LT-EFLT, there are signs that the role relationship between teacher educators and trainees is becoming less hierarchical. One of the significant roles of teacher educators is to facilitate change by helping trainees to become reflective practitioners and researchers of their own work (Schon, 1983; 1987; Wallace, 1991). Such a role of educators should be emphasized in the course for continuing professional development in Japan as well as in Canada. There might be a growing awareness that teacher development at the individual level and change at the institutional level are more likely to occur when teachers are involved in articulating their needs and shaping how such change may take place. In order to promote innovation in EFL education in Japan, both initial and in-service teachers are expected to uncover tacit beliefs about learning and teaching English, and to critically evaluate their uncovered beliefs with a view to changing them, and subsequently, their daily classroom practice (Edwards, 2004).

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APPENDIX I Questionnaire on LT-EFLT (Instructor X)

[Information about yourself]

- a) Your motivation to become a teacher of English
- b) Your educational background
- c) Your career as a teacher

[Language Training for EFL Teaching]

- 1. What was a primary goal of your course?
- 2. What kinds of approaches did you use?
- 3. Did you realize your goal? How did you know that?
- 4. How did you help your students to develop their communication skills?
- 5. How did you promote their positive attitudes towards communication in English?
- 6. How did you take the followings into consideration?
 - a) Teaching resources b) Tasks c) Feedback d) Evaluation
- 7. Do you think that your students felt comfortable in your classes? Why did you think so?
- 8. How did you deal with the followings?
 - a) Grammatical errors b) Individual students' differences
- 9. What do you think of your class size?
- 10. What do you think of group work in your classes?
- 11. With regard to the followings, what are your ideals?
 - a) Students b) Instructors c) Learning/teaching context

Questionnaire on LT-EFLT (Students)

Home country: () First language: ()
 Sex: () Age: () Occupation: ()

[English language learning]

- 1. For what and how long are you studying English?
- 2. What kinds of approaches did your teachers implement in English classes in your home countries?
- 3. What do you think of your English proficiency?

[Language Training for EFL Teaching]

- 1. Why did you take the course?
- 2. Could you develop your communicative competence in the course? How did your trainer help you to do so?
- 3. Could you promote your positive attitudes towards communication in English? How did your instructor help you to do so?
- 4. How did your instructor take the followings into consideration?
 - a) Teaching resources b) Tasks c) Feedback d) Evaluation
- 5. Did you feel comfortable in your classes? Why do you think so?
- 6. How did your instructor cope with the followings?
 - a) Grammatical errors b) Individual students' differences

- 7 . What do you think of your class size?
- 8 . What do you think of group work in your classes?
- 9 . With regard to the followings, what are your ideals?
 - a) Students b) Instructors c) Learning/teaching context

APPENDIX II

Language Training for EFL Teaching *The University of Toronto*

Course Details

For non-native speakers of English

This course is designed for those who are teaching or who are thinking about teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in their home country and who want to refine their own English skills while reviewing teaching methodology. Language instruction includes all language skills, and learning activities and materials are drawn from the field of EFL. Subject content includes an overview of current teaching and learning theories and practices.

Special Features:

- Individual speaking/pronunciation diagnostic
- Practice Interview Program (PIP)
- Teaching observations
- Peer-teaching practice
- Workshop on using the Internet for teaching English
- Access to the University of Toronto's 50 libraries and computers and on-site computer room
- An optional, and at cost, Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and TOEIC Certificate
- *Certificate in Language Training for EFL Teaching* upon successful completion

Testing and Assessment:

Evaluation is based on classroom performance and participation, assignments, in-class quizzes, oral presentations, practice teaching sessions, and a final test.

All Language Training for EFL Teaching students are required to arrive at 9:00 am on the first day of the course for check-in and placement testing.

Note: This Certificate does not permit you to teach English as a Second Language in Canada or any other English-speaking country.

Learner Outcomes

- Learn accurate and appropriate management of oral and written discourse
- Identify reading and listening strategies and how to be a better reader and listener yourself

- Improve your grammar and build your vocabulary
- Develop an understanding of your own problems in English, and the monitoring and correction techniques that work for you
- Explore pedagogical issues and classroom management concerns
- Discover a wide range of textual, visual, audio and on-line resources

Prerequisites

A high-intermediate to advanced proficiency level in English.

Recommendations

None

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