

## Teaching English through English (TETE)

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# Teaching English through English (TETE)

Mitsuaki Hayase

## Introduction

The present paper discusses several important issues related to TETE with the purpose of understanding what TETE is all about and finding what English teachers from JHS through UNIV in Japan are expected to do in order to put life into TETE. After reviewing the actual situation in Japan, the paper reveals possible reasons behind the fact that TETE has not particularly permeated in this country, shows a lack of empirical evidence of the efficacy of TETE, examines theories and hypotheses of TETE, and finally gives specific suggestions to carry out TETE. In this paper, TETE is operationally defined as “teaching English mostly through English.”

## 1. Actual situation

How is English taught in junior high schools (JHS), senior high schools (SHS), and universities (UNIV) in terms of “the use of English? Do teachers teach their classes mostly in English or in Japanese? It is important to know the actual situation as to the use of English in English classes before a discussion of TETE begins. As for the actual situation at JHS and SHS, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has been conducting an annual survey on the use of English by teachers and students since 2005, and the results will be shown in the next section prior to the discussion on the actual situation at UNIV.

### 1.2 Actual situation at JHS and SHS

#### (1) JHS: Teachers

Table 1 Junior high schools where more than half (left side)/most (right side) of English class is taught in English (Use of English by teachers in percentage)

	2004		2005		2006		2007	
1 <sup>st</sup> -year	32.0	3.9	31.5	3.8	32.2	3.6	30.9	3.3
2 <sup>nd</sup> -year	31.2	3.7	31.1	3.6	30.9	3.4	30.3	3.2
3 <sup>rd</sup> -year	30.0	4.0	29.7	3.9	29.3	4.2	29.2	3.7

Based on the MEXT (2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008)

(2) SHS: teachers

Table 2 “Oral Communication I” and “English I” in senior high schools where more than half (left side)/most (right side) of English class is taught in English (Use of English by teachers in percentage)

	2004		2005		2006		2007	
Oral Communication I	32.0	48.0	31.5	46.9	32.7	45.3	34.0	45.8
	31.3	25.1	33.3	21.5	31.8	21.5	33.9	20.7
English I	20.3	3.7	23.1	9.9	25.7	9.6	24.3	9.8
	7.7	1.1	8.4	1.1	8.3	1.3	10.0	1.5
Reading	14.6	3.7	16.1	6.0	15.6	2.7	13.1	3.7
	5.0	0.7	4.3	0.4	5.2	0.4	5.4	0.5

\*Upper row: Schools with International and English departments

\*Lower row: All the other schools

Based on the MEXT (2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008)

(3) SHS: students

Table 3 Use of English by students in percentage

	2006		2007	
	Sometimes	In every lesson	Sometimes	In every lesson
Discussion and debate in “Communication I”	28.1	4.3	27.7	5.5
	13.9	1.3	12.3	1.2
Presenting information and ideas in “Communication I”	57.8	22.3	62.5	19.8
	51.3	11.0	54.4	11.1
Student-student talk in “Communication I”	28.8	68.3	29.2	66.4
	43.6	44.0	40.9	49.1
Student-student talk in “English I”	45.9	18.8	48.2	17.7
	39.9	4.5	40.2	4.8

\*Upper row: Schools with International and English departments

\*Lower row: All the other schools

Based on the MEXT (2007, 2008)

A close analysis of these tables reveals several intriguing facts. First, both at JHS and SHS, as to the use of English by the teachers the overall percentages in the various classes did not change much throughout the surveyed four years. In other words, there was not a conspicuous increase or decrease in the use of English by the teachers at JHS and SHS. Second, at JHS about 30% of the teachers conducted more than half of their class in English even though only about three percent conducted most of their classes in English. Altogether, about one-third of the teachers conducted at least more than half of their classes in English. Though one-third is not a high rate, it is a good starting point to increase the percentage in the future. Third, at SHS, there is a big gap between schools with International and English departments and all the other schools with the percentage of the former higher than that of the latter in all the subjects surveyed. It is understandable as those schools with International and English departments are generally more enthusiastic and determined to use English as much as possible.

Fourth, as to “Oral Communication I” in schools with International and English departments, about one third of the teachers used English in half of their classes while about half of them used English in most of their classes. Put together, about 80% of the teachers use English at least half of their classes, which creates an ideal situation to increase the percentage of the teachers conducting most of the class in English in the future. Sixth, as to “English I” and ”Reading”, the percentages are not favorable at either of schools. The percentages in “English I” and “Reading” in all the other schools are particularly low; only about one or two percent of the teachers used English most of their classes, a far cry from the proposal guideline issued by the MXET on December 22, 2008 (Koko no gakushushidoyoryo kaiteian) which stipulates that “all the English classes at SHS should be conducted in English as a principle.” If the MEXT is serious about the stipulation, a drastic change in teaching methods, textbooks, examinations, and possibly teachers’ skills in English and teaching methods is needed before the new course of study is put into use in 2013 with the first-year students. At present it is

known that compared to the current textbooks, a far greater emphasis on communication skills will be put in the new textbooks with the change of the names of textbooks in which the words like “communication”, “expressions in English”, and “English conversation” will be frequently used. Finally, as to the use of English by students at SHS in 2006 and 2007, by far the most common activity in both kinds of schools is student-to-student talk in “Communication I” shown in the percentage of about 40 to 70 (in every lesson) and about 30 to 40 (sometimes), but the percentages are rather low for the other activities. In order for the English classes to be conducted in English as a principle, students need to use English as much as their teachers, and appropriate measures should be taken.

## **1.2. The actual situation at UNIV**

Sans specific statistical data on the actual situation at UNIV regarding the use of English in college classrooms, the discussion will be confined to personal experiences and information gathered through conversations with people. To begin with, it has been said that the classes most frequently taught in English may be science classes at graduate school. There can be at least two reasons for this. The first reason is that among those graduate-level science classes are foreign students from other countries whose Japanese competency necessary for understanding lectures and discussing subject matters may not be at the required level while their English competency is. The second reason is that it may not be so challenging for Japanese teachers to teach their classes in English as the teachers and students use formulae and English terminology specific to the subject. At the undergraduate level, there are mainly two kinds of English classes: those for non-English majors and for English majors. It can be speculated that classes for English majors are more frequently taught in English than those for non-English majors. Among the classes for English majors are also two kinds: skill-oriented classes and content classes. Again, it can be speculated that the former is

more frequently taught in English than the latter, but it stays as speculation. On the whole, however, the frequency of the use of English at UNV must be much lower than that at JHS and SHS. An in-depth survey on the use of English at UNIV is urgent.

## **2. Possible reasons for the lack of English use**

It has been shown that from JHS through UNIV English classes are not taught in English as much as they can be. What are the possible reasons for this? First, we look into the twelve possible reasons common to JHS through UNIV and two possible reasons particular to JHS and SHS.

### **2.1 JHS through UNIV**

Oyabu (2007) points out five possible reasons why the teachers at her college do not teach English classes in English, and four of those reasons can be the same from JHS through UNIV.

- (1) Internalization of “native speaker fallacy” and inferiority complex: Some teachers tend to think that they should be able use English just like native speakers if they were to use English in class. As they cannot, they do not use English in class, just like underachieving students who do not speak English as they are not good at English and have an inferiority complex.
- (2) Absence of role models: Most Japanese teachers of English did not have English classes taught in English by Japanese instructors when they were students; therefore, they have not had role models.
- (3) Traditional style of instruction requiring a lot of talking on the part of the teacher: Traditionally, teachers have talked a lot in class, and there may be teachers who think that they cannot give the same amount of information in English. They are not familiar with teaching methods where students talk much more than the teacher. In other words, they lack training in teaching English through English.

(4) Lack of theoretical knowledge about SLA (second language acquisition): Due to a lack of theoretical knowledge in SLA, some teachers may feel reluctant to teach English class in English.

Besides these reasons, Mizohata (2006), a teacher at a senior high school, and Sato (2008), a teacher at college, add the following.

(5) Inefficiency: it is inefficient to teach in English as it is time-consuming and students get confused.

(6) Preconceived idea about how English should be taught and learned by the students.

(7) Lack of experience for the teacher and students to use English among Japanese.

(8) Lack of teachers' English proficiency

The following possible reasons can be added to this list.

(9) Lack of teachers' confidence: teachers have competence but not confidence.

(10) Lack of time: too much time is necessary in preparation and in conducting class itself if done in English.

(11) Belief that the instruction in Japanese is better than that in English: In the class taught in English, students may not understand class content 100% like in the class taught mainly in Japanese.

There may be other possible reasons, but it should be considered that these are the main ones. Also, as to the absence of roles models in (2), some may argue that there are native-speaker teachers who can be role models, and they are certainly good role models of a kind, and Japanese teachers can learn a great deal from them. Japanese teachers who teach English in English are another kind of role models as they share learning experiences of the English language with students and can be more realistic role models.

## 2.2 JSH and SHS

(1) Entrance examinations: If English classes are taught in English, there might be apprehension that the necessary knowledge and skills for entrance examinations

may not be obtained by students. This apprehension seems to be greater in SHS than in JHS.

- (2) Lack of uniformity: In most JSH and SHS, several teachers teach different classes of the same grade, and sometimes it is difficult to arrive at a consensus to teach their classes in English. Also, in the same situation, if some of them teach their classes in English and the others in Japanese, there is a possibility that those teachers teaching in English cannot cover all the lessons planned to be finished by all the teachers including the ones teaching in Japanese, as it may take more time to teach the same thing in English. This may lead to reluctance to teach English in English.

### **3. Empirical evidence**

Is there any empirical evidence that TETE is more efficient than teaching English through the mother tongue? According to Eldridge (1996), "...there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that restricting mother tongue use would necessarily improve learning efficiency..." (p. 303). Also, I remember the following dialogue between myself and Prof. Tomohiko Shirahata at Shizuoka University, a researcher in SLA (personal communication).

Hayase: Which is more efficient, teaching English through English or teaching English through Japanese?

Prof. Shirahata: I don't know. We need to experiment.

What Prof. Shirahata meant is that he was not aware of empirical research at that time to answer yes or no. Finally, Kanatani (2004) writes that he has not heard of evidence showing that the more English teachers use, the more students' English improve (p. 9).

If there is no dependable empirical evidence about the efficacy of TETE, we need to depend on theories and hypotheses of SLA.

### **4. Theories and hypotheses and their application in the classroom**



Very few people should disagree with the proposition that input plays the central role in SLA. The greatest part of language acquisition occurs through the understanding of messages (Shirai, 2008, p. 115). Sato (2009), after reviewing thirteen papers written by researchers, writes, “There is no lack of theories or hypotheses which regards input as a precondition for learning” (p. 371). Finally, “as long (*sic*) there is input, acquisition will occur” (Pike & Young-Scholten, 2009, p. 1).

How does input work in the classroom? First of all, English used by the teacher is a major source of language input for his/her students (Mee-Ling, 1996, p. 186). Hughes (1978, p. 6) also contends that “...the classroom situation *is* a genuine social environment which allows ‘the meaningful situational use of the language.’” In other words, teachers need to make efforts to maximize their students’ exposure to English. Secondly, an English environment, in which the use of English is abundant, helps the students to be convinced that it is an English class and that the conviction surely motivates them to study the language. Thirdly, through TETE, teachers become more confident in TETE, and at the same time, they realize the unsatisfactory areas as to their English, and they work more to improve themselves. In other words, unless they express themselves in English, they can’t find what they can’t express in English. If they know what they can’t express in English, then they can improve themselves by finding appropriate structures and expressions in books, dictionaries, etc.. For example, on one occasion, I was trying to explain what “meal” of “oatmeal” means. The only word which came up in my mind at that time was “pushed”. I am sure the listeners understood what I meant as I made gestures showing oatmeal as realia. But I was not satisfied with my word, so later I consulted a monolingual dictionary and found out that the better word is “crushed.” When I explain about the word “meal” in the future I will surely use this word learning from my experience of using English. Students can also improve themselves in the same way. Last but not least, teachers can save themselves from a double standard in which they encourage their students to use English adding

that it is all right to commit mistakes while they are conducting their classes in Japanese . Teachers also do make mistakes for various reasons in spite of themselves, but it shows to the students that it IS all right to make mistakes in using the target language. One caveat is what Sato (2009) aptly says as follows: “we maintain the attitude that we are trying to become more accurate and fluent” (p. 372).

## **5. Specific suggestions**

Now that the importance and implications of TETE is fully aware, several specific suggestions to promote TETE, with the understanding that the primary objective of TETE is to improve the students’ language, and to present them with :

- (1) carefully controlled listening practice and
- (2) opportunities for productive practice.

(Adapted from Lewis & Hill (2002), p. 12)

### **5.1 Decide to do it in English from day one**

When teachers teach English through English, the first thing they should do is to decide to teach English through English. This is crucial. It is important to make a firm resolution to do it. In order to tell themselves to put into this resolution into practice, it is also vital for them to be convinced that it is necessary to teach English through English. All of them should have their own reasons why they teach English through English. For me, not using English in class means depriving the students of opportunities to expose themselves to English and using it as a means of communication. For many students, classrooms are the only situations where they can improve their skills in English. Teachers should not rob the students of the opportunity to improve themselves. They need to be firmly conscious of the importance of TETE by having their own reasons for it.

## **5.2 Break the psychological barrier**

One major problem for many English teachers is not their English skills. They have enough skills to conduct their classes in English, but they are afraid of something. They have hesitation. They have anxiety. They have worries. They worry whether things go smoothly. They are reluctant to use English. They are afraid of making mistakes, even though they say to their students to use English without being afraid of committing errors as discussed at the end of section 4. In other words, they have communicative competence, but they may not have enough communicative confidence. So, what they need more is not English skills, but more encouragement to boost their confidence to use English. See the list of encouraging expressions about using English in appendix A.

## **5.3 Use code-switching**

A dictionary definition of code-switching goes as follows: “a change by a speaker (or writer) from one language or language variety to another” (Richards, J. C. et al, ed., 2002, p. 81). TETE does not advocate that English should be used all the time from the beginning to the end of each class. It allows judicious use of the mother tongue. There are occasions where use of Japanese is more efficient than that of English such as grammar and vocabulary explanations or instructions for the procedure of task activities, even though there are scholars who argue that English should also be used in these occasions as they present genuine opportunities for teacher–student communication in the classroom (Harbord, 1992; Moody, 2003). As mentioned earlier, the MEXT’s new guidelines to be implemented in 2013 also states clearly that all the English classes at SHS should be taught in English as a principle (Koko no gakushushidoyoryo kaiteian, 2009). We should, however, switch back to English as soon as the necessary use of the Japanese language is over. See the checklist of code-switching in appendix B.

## **5.4 Improve ourselves**

All teachers need to be challenged to constantly improve themselves (Dash , 2002, p. 15). Fukushima (2006, p. 193) agrees with Dash and says that it is a basic need for English teachers to make continuous efforts to improve their own English skills. It is also necessary to improve their teachings skills as well. The so-called comprehensible input represented in “i +1” is certainly necessary for teachers to hone their English skills, especially to develop fluency and automaticity, but “i +1” surely does not contain too many unknown linguistic items--grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation for that matter--as the formula shows. For English language acquisition for acquirer teachers to occur, however, it can be argued that they also need “i +1+ $\alpha$ ” which is English far beyond English of their levels. It is difficult to define how much beyond this “i +1+ $\alpha$ ” should be, but one example of this for SHS students may be English studied for college entrance examinations. This example may demonstrate the importance of “i +1+ $\alpha$ ” and it may also give some hint for teachers as to what kind of English they should aim at. Or many of them can define their own “i +1+ $\alpha$ ” based on their current skills and their goals in English. “i +1+ $\alpha$ ” should make a world of difference.

Teachers also need to improve their English in such a way that they can modify their English to help their students to understand them. Effective skills in modifying English are paraphrasing and making appropriate example sentences and phrases on the spot. Use of bodily movements like gestures and facial expressions, use of drawings, illustrations, and diagrams, and use of realia, pictures, and videos are natural tools to assist modifying English. These auxiliaries and the use of modified English constitute an important part of teaching skills.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers teach English for the sake of their students. They want their students to improve their English. TETE should play a major role in achieving this goal. Now that various important aspects of TETE have been understood, teachers need to work on

more specific methods and techniques to be used at JHS, SHS, and UNIV while increasing TETE and their English and teaching skills. Primary schools need to be included in the discussion as English activities with a long history at primary schools will be compulsory beginning in 2011. Though the main aim of English activities is not to teach English skills, English is used by the teacher and students. It will be necessary to discuss TETE at primary, secondary and tertiary stages, and a close cooperation throughout the three stages will be crucial in order to make TETE bear expected results.

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### **Appendix A: List of encouraging expressions about using English**

These are expressions I have collected over many years.

- Don't be afraid of making mistakes; be afraid of losing chances to improve yourself when you don't even try to use English.
- Give yourself permission to make mistakes and learn from them—a tip on studying a foreign language, from a Web site of theUniversity of Texas
- Dare to embarrass yourself.
- Let us fail creatively.
- Run linguistic risks in conversation!
- Profit from mistakes!
- "Second language learning actually necessitates the making of mistakes."
- "Learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes."

The above two quotations are from: H. Douglas Brown (2007). *Principle of Language Learning and Teaching* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.), p. 159 and p. 257.

- "I have known failures. Those I have run from taught me nothing." Jane Fonda (2005). *Jane Fonda: My Life So Far*. New York: Random House, p. 573.
- "I have won 3,000 races, but I have also learned a lot from the horses that did not win.

I thank all of the horses.” Words by Yutaka Take, after winning 3,000 races in the Japan Racing Association (November 4, 2007, *Asahi Shinbun*, p. 2)

--“I can accept failure. Everyone fails at something. I can’t accept not trying.” Words by Michael Jordan, in *Powwow English Course I* (2002). Kyoto: Buneido, p. 117.

### **Appendix B: Checklist of code-switching**

- I. Which language do you use as the teacher?
  1. Greeting students at the beginning and end of the lesson of the day ( )
  2. Giving the introduction of the content of a section or a lesson in the textbook ( )
  3. Checking meanings of English words and sentences ( )
  4. Explaining vocabulary items ( )
  5. Explaining grammar rules ( )
  6. Using bilingual dictionaries ( )
  7. Using monolingual dictionaries ( )
  8. Explaining the meaning of the text ( )
  9. Giving instructions ( )
  10. Explaining the procedure and rules of exercises/communicative activities/tasks ( )
  11. Adminstrating tests ( )
  12. Establishing/facilitating/improving/maintaining/teacher-student rapport ( )
  13. Motivating students ( )
  14. Giving advice to students ( )
  15. Disciplining students ( )
  16. Giving a summary of the content of a section or a lesson in the textbook ( )
  17. Saving time ( )
- II. Which language do students use?
  1. Greeting the teacher and the other students at the beginning and end of the lesson of



- the day ( )
2. Using bilingual dictionaries ( )
  3. Using monolingual dictionaries ( )
  4. Doing exercises/communicative activities/tasks ( )
  5. Talking incidentally within exercises/communicative activities/tasks ( )
  6. Asking questions about grammar ( )
  7. Asking questions about vocabulary ( )
  8. Asking the meaning of phrases and sentences ( )
  9. Asking questions about exercises/communicative activities/tasks ( )

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**Notes:**

<sup>i</sup> In this paper, teachers mean non-native speakers of English, namely Japanese teachers of English.

<sup>ii</sup> The author of this paper is not unaware of the danger of discussing the three stages of English education in general terms as the quality and quantity at the three stages and even at each stage can be different, but it is also true that there are similarities across the three stages in some areas. Therefore, some discussions include the three stages and the others will include only one or two stages and the distinction is shown in the paper.