

## Special Seminar on English Language Education II

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### 1. Overview of this Class

The class was open to the four master's students who have studied effective teaching methods of English language. Two of them were in-service junior high school teachers, and their motivation and problem consciousness to the improvement of English classes were so high.

The students have theoretically and practically learned how to perform an experimental study in one group under the theme of "Difficulties in the Acquisition of English Grammar for Japanese EFL Junior High School Students". They have also studied educational statistics for analyzing data collected by themselves. Finally the results of the experiment will be written up as an English article.

This open class was done for discussing and confirming the contents of the draft before it was translated into the foreign language. All the students investigated each section of the paper, discussed their own questions with each other, and solve the problems utilizing various kinds of books, theses, and materials. In the class, the instructor pointed out wrong descriptions on the paper, answered their questions, and explained the related matters.

#### 1.1 Purposes of the Study

The experiment was done to reveal which grammatical items the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in junior high school have difficulties in

acquiring.

Research Question 1 is to examine grammatical items which are difficult to understand for beginners. Research Question 2 is to consider the differences between the students of high and low proficiency levels.

#### 1.2 Participants

A diagnostic test and grammar test of English language were held to the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders of a public junior high school in Ehime Prefecture ( $n=206$ ). Among them good learners ( $n=32$ ) and poor learners ( $n=27$ ) were chosen.

#### 1.3 Grammar Test

The Grammar test was given to the participants as a multiple-choice test. From their textbook 15 grammatical items which they had already studied in the 1<sup>st</sup> year were selected as test items; 1) articles, 2) be verbs, 3) what, 4) general verbs, 5) plural forms, 6) who, 7) imperative forms, 8) third person-singular-present forms, 9) when, 10) where, 11) progressive forms, 12) whose, 13) past tenses, 14) how, 15) which. These items were shown in the order that the participants had learned through the textbook. Each item had four questions, and 60 questions were set on a test paper. In addition, counterbalancing was made between the grammatical items and the participants.

## 1.4 Experimental Designs

Two repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed in Research Question 1 and 2.

## 1.5 Results and Discussions

In Research Question 1, 4) general verbs, 14) how and 15) which were regarded as the most difficult grammar items for the learners. General verbs seem apt to be confused with be verbs which are taught a little earlier. As the interrogatives have plural functions in one word, unless the learners memorize them completely, it's difficult to apply the functions to many situations. Moreover because "how" and "which" are learned at the busy end of the first year, explanation by teachers is considered to be insufficient.

In Research Question 2, good learners showed high correct rates more than 80%, but it turned out that they were not very good at 4) general verbs, 6) who, 7) imperative forms, 13) past tenses, 14) how and 15) which. The past tenses and imperative forms are closely related to the general verbs. All the same the appropriate acquisition of the general verbs can be said to become a key to all English grammar for the learners. The interrogatives are also used with verbs which are very important factors in learning English grammar. Those studies should be performed according to contexts and situations for certain understanding even in the good learners. As for the poor learners, all the grammatical items were regarded as their difficulties of English language acquisition. An individual item should strongly be learned with them connected to each other in the brain. They have to strengthen their memory by piling up each item. Especially the correct rates of items which are taught at the end of the year were less than 30 %.

The rearrangement of grammatical items in the textbook or the improvement of school curriculum throughout the year is

expected earlier.

## 2. Evaluations and Comments on the Class by the Observer

- To make students learn systematic paradigms of educational experiments including statistics in the group work was very interesting.
- The amounts of utterances of the students were huge and they showed much more positive and autonomous attitudes toward many activities in and out of the class than the observer had expected.
- The instructor's explanation and indication were very nice and clear, and easy to understand.
- In addition to theoretical consideration, there were a lot of practical exercises, so this class can become another class, "Practical Study on English Language Education".
- The observer asked if any textbook was used for the study of statistics. The instruction of fundamental statistics was held through many articles during the class, and some books were also recommended to buy for the self-study of the students.
- The observer asked about the methods of evaluations of each student performance. Their preparation for every class was excellent, and the cooperation to this collaborative project was perfect. So all the students will get high scores, but small differences may occur in the evaluation of the amounts of utterances for their opinions and questions.
- The observer pointed out several linguistic expressions on the students' handouts.