Toward Setting Professional Standards
for Teacher Development in Japan

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1. Introduction

Some researchers in Japan (e.g. Sugawara, 2011) claim that because the introduction of communicative English is one of the main causes of the recent decrease in students' English abilities, the instructional pendulum should swing back toward Grammar Translation Method (henceforth, GTM).

GTM has certainly produced some proficient English readers in Japan, but it has two major defaults: (1) it often results in many dropouts from English learning because it requires too much preparation for a class (Sakai, 1990), and (2) students learning via GTM usually do not have enough time to internalize what they study. Because the method focuses too much on translating a text, it does little to help students acquire the language. (Kanatani, 2004).

Why is this method rooted in Japan in spite of such significant drawbacks? The reasons can be summarized as follows: this method has a long history in Japanese language education. In addition, English teachers in Japanese secondary schools, through their experiences as students and teachers, are well-versed in this method's instructional goals and process, which helps students improve in English grammar and reading. Therefore, GTM has been a mainstream methodology with little variation across the Japanese educational landscape. This is mainly because the instructional design of GTM has been shared among many English teachers in Japan. The objectives of the design are two-fold: the first is mastery of school English grammar and the development of reading ability. Because school English grammar has been systematically organized, the understanding of each grammatical item serves as a benchmark that can measure students' English abilities. The reason for this philosophy is that because the set of benchmarks are organized by stages of difficulty, the process of language acquisition becomes transparent. Consequently, it becomes much easier for students to understand the items and their order of study and for teachers to understand the items and their order of instruction.

The other objective is developing students' English reading ability. In the basic stage, understanding the main texts of textbooks and progress in a student's level of understanding are the goal. In the applied stage, the materials are taken from past entrance examination questions and drill books used for practicing similar questions.

The evaluation measures whether a student can give correct answers to those questions. Naturally, the level of difficulty of the textbooks they study and the ranks of the universities they apply to serve as benchmarks.

Motivating students with this teaching method becomes very straight-forward: successful students can pass university entrance exams to the intuitions of their choice. Considering this background, it is quite understandable that an almost-unified instructional design has evolved nationwide in Japan.

Thus, the pushing force of GTM's prevailing is entrance exams that stress English grammar and reading ability, and the pulling force is using textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (henceforth, MEXT) in schools nationwide. As a result of the screening process of textbooks that is performed by MEXT, an individual teacher at a secondary school in Japan is not required to establish specific achievement criteria or study objectives for his or her students, because they are listed in the Course of Study enacted by MEXT, and textbooks authorized by MEXT are accompanied with thick teachers' manuals that typically contain an annual teaching plan with lists of teaching goals for all the lessons in the textbooks. When teachers attempt to teach grammatical items and explain the text, they can simply follow the order in which new items, whether lexical or grammatical, appear in the textbook and use published materials to clarify whatever is necessary.

Therefore, it can be assumed that GTM used in Japan is supported and promoted by those English teachers who have a vested interest in seeing their students obtain high scores on entrance exams. Naturally, the use of GTM as a modus operandi for entrance examinations has spread nationwide. This method is easy for teachers to use, so many students who did not want to go to college have nevertheless been taught by this method.

A strong point of this method is that it features benchmarks with high transparency. Although many years have passed since grammar classes departed from the formal high school curriculum, GTM is still enjoying popularity, judging from the considerable number of supplementary English grammar textbooks published each year. This also indicates that some teachers have a strong belief that English grammar should be taught in English classes.

2．Some reasons Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth, CLT) has not been popular in Japan

In a narrow sense, the significance of learning a foreign language differs from person to person. However, in a broad sense, it can be stated that it nurtures an awareness of people with different cultures and languages, promotes human communication, deepens mutual understanding, and contributes to world peace. In addition, it fosters the attitude that learning a foreign language (or several languages) is necessary. Accordingly, when

learning a foreign language, it is important to develop communicative competence. For that purpose, CLT methodology has evolved. It has been more than 20 years since CLT was introduced, yet it has still not found acceptance in Japanese educational settings. Let us examine the reasons for this phenomenon.

Perhaps, one reason that CLT has not gained more supporters in Japan is that the people concerned did not share the rationale of CLT in terms of entrance exams. In Japan, obtaining a high score on the English tests is an indicator of high achievement. Therefore, not training students to achieve good scores on a written test is judged as a methodological liability. Therefore, most of the teachers at secondary schools are not convinced that CLT can nurture capable test takers. This is evidenced by the following fact:

The Course of Study enforced in 1994 instructed all high schools to teach oral communication, based on CLT principles, in EFL classes. Then oral communication became a mandatory subject but it was taught in mostly one year classes, and almost no high schools taught it at all through the three years of English instruction. In the preceding Course of Study enforced in 2003, high schools could choose either "General English" or "Communication English." Many teachers thought that the former was more consistent with GTM but the latter was supposed to be based on CLT. Contrary to MEXT's expectations, almost all high schools chose "General English." MEXT, however, definitely wants to promote CLT and in the current Course of Study enforced in 2013, "General English" is not be included, and all the high schools are required to teach "Communication English."

Thus, MEXT has been eager to make communicative English teaching succeed; however, MEXT has not provided teachers with a template for an instructional design. It has simply instructed teachers to use CLT. Naturally, this top-down policy, without much consultation and support, has met with strong opposition or lip service. Unless the system is fundamentally revised, emphasis may continue to be placed on grammar-translation in secondary schools in Japan.

3. English teachers' English proficiency in Japan

As mentioned above, English has been considered to be an important subject for entrance exams. Thus, teachers have been expected to be able to give correct answers to entrance exam questions. Many of them have used and still use the Japanese language in English classes as a major means of instruction. Thus, their English proficiency had not been a major concern. However, these days, people have come to realize English teachers should have a high level of English proficiency.

In 2002, in order to increase the number of Japanese people who could use English skillfully, MEXT stipulated in the Strategic Plan (2002) that all teachers of English should possess an English ability equivalent to the Pre-First Grade on the Society for

Testing English Proficiency (STEP) test, TOEFL (PBT) 550, or TOEIC 730, as well as didactic competencies. The Pre-First Grade of the STEP is equivalent to the C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (henceforth, CEFR). However, the didactic competencies were not explained in any detail.

After ten years, in 2012, MEXT conducted a nationwide survey concerning English teachers' English abilities and determined that 27.7% of junior high school teachers and 52.3% of high school English teachers met MEXT's requirement (MEXT, 2013).

4. Teacher development and in-service training

The European Commission (2007, p. 3) has declared that other studies (e.g. Angrist & Lavy, 2001) have found positive relationships between in-service teacher training and student achievement and "suggested that an in-service training program . . . raised children's achievement . . . (and) suggested that teacher training may provide a less costly means of increasing test scores than reducing class size or adding school hours." Accordingly a current trend in education in developed countries is "professional standards for teachers depend on their stages of development" (Osaki, 2008). However, Japan is an exception to this trend. As a case in point, when a teacher certification renewal system was introduced in 2009, this policy was implemented in a very haphazard way, without due consultation among stakeholders or clearly-defined objectives. As a result, the new assessment mechanism was widely criticized as inadequate by professional educators. Focusing on the in-service training mentioned above, there are obligatory training programs organized for Japanese public school teachers, depending on their experience. However, research conducted by the Japan Association of College English Teachers (henceforth, JACET) Special Interest Group (henceforth, SIG) on English Education (2009) demonstrates that most of these programs do not incorporate standards or benchmarks that map teachers' ongoing developmental pathways.

Concerning English language ability, MEXT (2011) established five new opinions in order to enhance the Japanese people's abilities in English, a common international language. Among them, in terms of English teachers' English competencies, MEXT followed the strategic plan issued in 2002, which stated that all teachers of English should possess an English ability at least equivalent to the Pre-First Grade level of the STEP test, TOEFL (PBT) 550, and TOEIC 730. However, again, they did not set specific benchmarks or standards concerning didactic competencies.

A report from the Central Education Council in Japan (2012) concerning "A Comprehensive Plans for Enhancing Teachers' Didactic Disposition throughout their Teaching Careers" stated only that the Council would create a system that could enable an individual teacher to visualize professional development throughout his or her career.

5．Adapting EPOSTL to the Japanese Educational Context

Members of the JACET SIG on English Education, including the author, have been studying ways of creating practical tools to help English teachers improve their didactic competencies. In 2008, the SIG members came across the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (henceforth, EPOSTL) (Newby et al., 2007), studied it carefully, and concluded that a Japanese version would be the solution they needed.

The SIG report from 2009 (p. 16) explains:

EPOSTL was developed for the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe by an international team of teacher educators. It was built on basis of three documents: CEFR, the European Language Portfolio (henceforth, ELP), and the European Profile for Language Teacher Education—A Frame of Reference (Profile). The EPOSTL is "intended for students undergoing their initial teacher education which encourages them to reflect on the didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps them to assess their own didactic competences and enables them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching during the course of their teacher education" (p. 83). It consists of three main sections: a personal statement, a self-assessment, and a dossier.
This research project focuses on a self-assessment section. The self-assessment section containing 195 "can-do" descriptors somewhat similar to the CEFR statements is designed to "facilitate reflection and self-assessment by student teachers" (p. 84). The descriptors were elaborated not as a fixed qualification profile, but as competences for both student teachers and practicing teachers to strive to attain throughout their teaching career.

At that time, many members of the SIG were engaged in student teacher training. Therefore, the SIG's project was to create a portfolio for student teachers based on EPOSTL. The reasons for this policy of adaptation were threefold: to reduce the number of descriptors to 100 because our team used a computer-scored answer sheet with 100 items; to eliminate some descriptors that would take a long time to practice in class because the period of the teaching practicum is three to four weeks for senior high school teachers and two weeks for junior high school teachers; and to eliminate some descriptors that were not suitable for the Japanese educational context. The set of descriptors for student teachers is called the Japan Portfolio of Student Teachers of Languages (henceforth, J-POSTL) (see Appendix).
The SIG conducted some pilot research to guarantee J-POSTL's validity and reliability by holding workshops with the original developers of EPOSTL, David Newby

and Barry Jones, who were from Europe and Britain, respectively. The SIG sent self-report questionnaires to teachers who had students in pre-service training courses in various universities. By considering the research results carefully, 100 descriptors were fixed. The process of the research can be downloaded from the SIG archive here: (http://www.waseda.jp/assoc-jacetenedu/)

The list consisting of 100 descriptors was tested for three years and discovered to be an effective tool for helping newly-hired teachers in induction programs, as well as student teachers, reflect on their practices.

In 2011, using descriptors that were not used to create J-POSTL, the SIG decided to begin developing a reflective tool for currently serving English teachers to use for professional development throughout their career stages. The list of descriptors is a tool called the Japan Portfolio for Teachers of Languages (henceforth, J-POTL), which would not only visualize the process of reaching didactic competency goals but also help teachers reflect on their practices and improve their didactic competencies and autonomy.

After conducting some steps of the pilot studies, the SIG decided to conduct a nationwide survey using a set of 62 descriptors divided into three categories: 41 descriptors for didactic competencies, eight descriptors for competencies needed to guide students to improve their intercultural awareness, and 13 descriptors for competencies needed to help students enhance their autonomy.

From June through July of 2012, two sets of self-report questionnaires, including the descriptors, were sent to 16,500 secondary schools in Japan, asking their principals to hand one to their newest teacher and the other to their most senior teacher. Both teachers were requested to report whether each of the descriptors was valid or not using a Likert scale: 5: strongly valid, 4: rather valid, 3: I don't know, 2: less valid, and 1: never valid.

６．Results

6.1 Basic statistical data
（1）Schools: 5,658 （100%）
    a）Junior high schools: 3,263 （58.2%）
    b）Senior high schools: 1,789 （31.9%）
    c）Integrated high schools: 384 （6.8%）
    d）Other: 170 （3.1%）
（2）Average: All the 62 descriptors, 3.52
    a）41 descriptors for didactic competencies, 3.66
    b）8 descriptors for intercultural awareness, 3.45
    c）13 descriptors for autonomy, 3.12
（3）The reliability coefficient for all of the categories was greater than 0.9. Therefore,

based on the hypothesis that all instructive competencies are improved by practice, the author analyzed the data to make a suggestion regarding reflective benchmarks for professional development: a reflective benchmark for an apprentice-teacher level (shorter than five years' experience), one for a practitioner-teacher level (five to nine years' experience), and one for a veteran-teacher level (more than 10 years' experience).

6.2　Findings
6.2.1　Concerning didactic competencies

　　The SIG members were able to divide 41 descriptors for didactic competencies across three levels of teacher experience: 13 descriptors for an apprentice-level teacher, 15 descriptors for a practitioner-level teacher, and 13 descriptors for a veteran-level teacher. The number located in front of each descriptor is a sequential number from J-POTL.

The apprentice- level teacher:
4. I can evaluate and select meaningful speaking and interactional activities to encourage learners of differing abilities to participate.
5. I can evaluate and select different activities to help learners to become aware of and use different text types (telephone conversations, transactions, speeches, etc.).
7. I can help learners to use communication strategies (asking for clarification, comprehension checks, etc.) and compensation strategies (paraphrasing, simplification, etc.) in spoken interaction.
10. I can help learners to monitor, reflect on, edit, and improve their own writing.
12. I can help learners to apply strategies to cope with difficult or unknown vocabulary in a text.
15. I can introduce and help students to deal with new or unknown items of grammar in a variety of ways (teacher presentation, awareness-raising, discovery, etc.).
20. I can ensure smooth transitions between activities and tasks for individuals, groups, and the whole class.
21. I can present language content (new and previously-encountered items of language, topics, etc.) in ways that are appropriate for individuals and specific groups of learners.
32. I can use a valid institutional/national/international grading system in my assessment of a learner's performance.
33. I can assign grades for tests and examinations using procedures that are reliable and transparent.
34. I can help learners to set personal targets and assess their own performance.
35. I can help learners to engage in peer assessment.
41. I can deal with errors that occur in spoken and written language in ways that support learning processes and do not undermine confidence and communication.

The practitioner-level teacher:

1. I can design language courses around the requirements of the Course of Study.

3. I can identify and investigate specific pedagogical/didactic issues related to my learners or my teaching in the form of action research.

6. I can evaluate and select activities that help learners to participate in ongoing spoken exchanges (conversations, transactions, etc.) and to initiate or respond to utterances appropriately.

8. I can evaluate and select a range of meaningful writing activities to help learners become aware of and use appropriate language for different text types (letters, stories, reports, etc.).

9. I can evaluate and select a variety of materials to stimulate writing (authentic materials, visual aids, etc.).

14. I can help learners to develop critical reading skills (reflection, interpretation, analysis, etc.).

16. I can evaluate and select tasks that help learners to use new vocabulary in oral and written contexts.

22. I can take on different roles according to the needs of the learners and the requirements of the activity (resource person, mediator, supervisor, etc.).

24. I can use various strategies when learners do not understand the target language.

25. I can encourage learners to relate the target language to other languages they speak or have learned where and when this is helpful.

31. I can use the process and results of assessment to inform my teaching and plan learning for individuals and groups (i.e., formative assessment).

36. I can assess a learner's ability to understand and interpret a spoken text such as listening for gist, specific or detailed information, implication, etc.

37. I can assess a learner's ability to understand and interpret a written text such as reading for gist, specific or detailed information, implication, etc.

39. I can assess a learner's ability to engage in written interaction according to criteria such as content, range, accuracy, fluency, and appropriateness of response, etc.

The veteran-level teacher:

2. I can take into account and assess the expectations and impact of educational stakeholders (employers, parents, funding agencies, etc.).

11. I can use peer-assessment and feedback to assist the writing process.

13. I can evaluate and select a variety of post-listening tasks to provide a bridge between listening and other skills.

17. I can evaluate and select activities (role plays, simulated situations, etc.) that help learners to develop their socio-cultural competencies.

18. I can select and use ICT materials and activities in the classroom that are

appropriate for my learners.

19. I can plan to teach elements of other subjects using the target language (cross-curricular teaching, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), etc.).

23. I can teach the target language and how to study it through the target language.

26. I can help learners to use relevant presentation tools.

27. I can recognize when and where there is a need for extracurricular activities to enhance learning (learner magazines, clubs, excursions, etc.).

28. I can help to organize exchanges in cooperation with relevant resource persons and institutions.

29. I can negotiate with learners how their work and progress should best be assessed.

30. I can assess a learner's ability to work independently and collaboratively.

38. I can assess a learner's ability to engage in spoken interaction according to criteria such as content, range, accuracy, fluency, and conversational strategies.

40. I can assess the learners' knowledge of the cultural facts, events, etc. of the target language communities.

6.3 Regarding intercultural awareness

The results indicated that the average score for instructive ability regarding intercultural awareness was lower than that for didactic ability. This showed that there were various problems in intercultural awareness instruction in secondary education classrooms in Japan.

As for the classification of such items in terms of years of experience, six of the eight descriptors could be divided in this was.

Four descriptors fell into an apprentice-teacher level:

1) I can appreciate and make use of the value added to the classroom environment by learners with diverse cultural backgrounds.

5) I can create opportunities for learners to explore the culture of target language communities outside of class (Internet, email, etc.).

6) I can evaluate and select activities that enhance learners' intercultural awareness./ I can evaluate and select a variety of texts and activities to make learners aware of the interrelationship between culture and language.

7) I can evaluate the learning outcomes of school trips, exchanges, and international cooperation programs.

One descriptor fell into the practitioner-teacher level:

2) I can evaluate and select a variety of texts, source materials, and activities that make learners aware of similarities and differences in sociocultural "norms of behavior."

One descriptor fell into the veteran-teacher level:

8) I can assess the learner's ability to respond and act appropriately in encounters with the target language culture.

As for others, two descriptors were not categorized:

3) I can evaluate and select a variety of texts, source materials, and activities that help learners to reflect on the concept of "otherness" and understand different value systems.

4) I can evaluate and select a variety of texts, source materials, and activities to make learners aware of stereotyped views and challenge them.

However, these two descriptors do not belong to the same category. More than half of the apprentice-level and the practitioner-level teachers believed that #3 was valid for teachers, whereas only the veteran-level teachers thought that #4 was less valid for teachers.

6.4 As for learner autonomy

The fact that the average score for the competencies related to helping students enhance their autonomy was lower than that for instructive ability regarding intercultural awareness showed the harsh reality that many teachers had difficulty helping students to improve their autonomy. Of the 13 descriptors, the responses to some items showed significant differences based on level of experience. However, not all of the descriptors could be categorized into levels of experience with statistical significance. That is, some descriptors indicated that those instructive competencies should be challenged by Japanese teachers of English at all levels.

Targets for novice teachers:

1) I can involve learners in lesson planning, discuss lesson planning with them, make a lesson plan, and use it in class.

3) I can select a variety of activities that help learners to reflect their existing knowledge and competencies.

4) I can select a variety of activities that help learners to identify and reflect on individual learning processes and learning styles and to develop specific learning strategies and study skills.

5) I can set the content, type, and volume of homework in cooperation with learners.

Targets for the apprentice-level teacher:

6) I can plan and manage project work according to relevant aims and objectives.

7) I can assist learners in their choices during the various stages of project work.

9) I can set specific aims and objectives of portfolio work for students.

Targets for teachers at all levels, except novice-level teachers:

2) I can guide learners to produce materials for themselves and for other learners, and use these in class.

8) I can assess the process and outcome of project work in cooperation with learners.
10) I can plan to guide students to structure portfolio work.
11) I can supervise and give constructive feedback on portfolio work.
12) I can encourage self- and peer assessment of portfolio work.
13) I can initiate and facilitate various learning environments such as learning platforms, discussion forums, web pages, etc.

7．Discussion

It is often said that teachers grow though practice. The results of the current study have provided evidence for this because the 41 descriptors for didactic competencies can be categorized into three levels of teacher experience. In addition, the results suggest that the 41 descriptors can be used as benchmarks for English teachers' professional development. On the other hand, the result showed that by conducting daily practices English teachers in Japan were not able to acquire some competencies, such as instructive competencies that help students to enhance intercultural awareness and/or autonomy. New seminars for these competencies should be developed for teachers' further professional development. This will greatly contribute to the improvement of language education in Japan.

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―abstract―

In Japan, English teachers have employed the Grammar-Translation Method. On the other hand, Communicative Language Teaching has not been popular. This is mainly because English has been considered an important subject for entrance examinations. In the past, teachers were only required to prepare students for these entrance exams. Therefore, their English proficiency was seldom questioned. However, these days, Japan has started to set professional standards for teacher development. The research team, including the author, attempted to create a reflective tool to help teachers develop their instructive abilities. By conducting a nationwide survey, 41 didactic competencies were divided among the teachers' life stages. However, the competencies needed to help students develop a sense of intercultural awareness and learner autonomy were not necessarily divided in terms of teachers' years of experience.