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Proceedings of the Annual NEAR Conference

From the Editors:

We are pleased to be publishing our second peer-reviewed issue of the NEAR conference proceedings.

In this issue, we present works on two topics. The first, *Tabletop Games and Language Tasks in the EFL Classroom, by Martin Sedaghat,* explores the uses of board and card games to enhance learning in language classrooms. Martin also explains the challenges of using such games and how they can also be utilized for pre- and post-class activities. In the second article, *Applying and Adapting the New Course of Study at Elementary School* by Mark Fennelly, the author offers insights into the new Course of Study and the materials based on it, and gives suggestions about how this change will influence teachers working in elementary schools and in English education throughout the school system in Japan.

Again, we hope you will enjoy reading and learning both theoretical and practical ideas from this research.

Dr. Melodie Cook, University of Niigata Prefecture

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Applying and Adapting the New Course of Study at Elementary School[1]

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Abstract

From 2020, a new course of study became national policy at the elementary school level requiring foreign language activities for third and fourth graders and English as an official subject for fifth and sixth graders. For classroom teachers and teacher trainers alike, it is vital that they understand the main concepts that form the basis of the Course of Study, and the teaching philosophy on which subsequent materials and textbooks are based in order to adapt them for meaningful learning in local contexts.In this paper the author aims to offer insight into the new Course of Study and the materials based on it, suggesting how this change will influence teachers working in elementary schools and in English education throughout the school system. Change in teaching practice requires changes in teacher training and it is hoped that this paper will also highlight important perspectives for teacher trainers.

2020 年に新学習指導要領が導入され、小学校3・4年生外国語活動、5・6年生の教科としての外国語科が完全実施となった。学校で指導にあたる教員ももちろんのこと、教員養成関係者も新学習指導要領の要点や求めている指導のあり方を理解しなければならない。地域に応じた教育を実践するために、学習指導要領やそれをもとに作られた認定教科書や教材の理念を理解することは欠かせない。 この論文では新学習指導要領の要点を明確にし、指導者や指導者養成に関わっている方々がどのような授業改革求めているかを明確にする。

Keywords: Course of Study, elementary school, language activities, goal, setting, situation

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Fenelly, M. G. (2022). Applying and adapting the new course of study at elementary school. *Proceedings of the Annual NEAR Conference*, 2, 1-15.

With the new Course of Study for elementary school having been fully implemented in 2020 and the new junior high school Course of Study introduced in 2021, the new Course of Study for high school will be introduced from 2022. Due to these changes, policy regarding school language education will follow common basic philosophies and goals, new textbook materials and evaluation criteria based on these philosophies will be introduced, and it is essential that teachers and teacher trainers understand these changes. In this paper, I will focus on the main points of the new Course of Study for elementary school, as the key philosophies are the same at the junior and senior high school levels.

Ministry of Education (MEXT) Policy

The Course of Study in Japan outlines education content and goals for all registered schools. The Course of Study (hereafter CS) is updated about every 10 years and only textbooks based on the CS will be approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) and can be used in schools. Though, as Kikuchi & Browne (2009) note, the CS may not immediately influence classroom practice, it is expected that significant changes in the new CS and the materials based on it will have, over time, considerable influence on classroom practices throughout school education.

Changes in Society

Changes in society and government policies influence the content and goals outlined in the CS which often attempts to offer content to nurture young people for a yet to be seen future. Under the most recent change, issues such as globalization, an aging society and the expected influences of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on future lives and careers were at the forefront. (MEXT, 2017b)

Japan's population demographics show an aging society with and ever falling birthrate (IPSS, 2017). A future lack of labor and increasing globalization suggests that children today may work in a very different society when they come of age. Davidson (2011) and Frey & Osborne (2013) also note the influence that AI may have on the future for today's children: half of jobs are to be automated and 65% of children will be doing jobs that do not exist yet.

Globalization is a keyword in many government policies, including education. The number of non-Japanese residents in Japan increases annually with close to 3 million foreign residents by 2019 (MOJ, 2019). However, it is more in the global economy and in industry where pressure for globalization can be felt. Despite the fact that majority of

new employees in a survey by Sanno University (Sanno, 2017) believe that companies should further proceed with globalization, a large proportion (60%) are reluctant to work overseas. The largest reason stated in the survey was a lack of confidence in English ability. This lack of language confidence is thought to be a barrier to global expansion of the economy, prompting increasing pressure from the government to improve language education

Language Issues

Confidence in English, however, may not truly represent language ability. TOEFL and TOEIC rankings are often used as benchmarks to compare Japanese English abilities with other countries. Recent rankings show Japan to be performing poorly in comparison to rival countries in Asia, notably Korea and China. TOEIC (2019) rankings showed South Korea to have significantly higher scores than Japan. Performance domestically based on the 'Eiken' Step tests, which are the most widely administered language proficiency assessment tests, showed, through a government survey (MEXT, 2016) only around 36 percent of JHS/HS students reaching the third grade/grade pre-two goals respectively, falling short of the government goals of 50% by 2020.

Other countries such as China and South Korea have also been implementing and conducting English education from earlier ages in recent years. South Korea began English as a subject from third grade in 1997 and China followed suit in 2001. How much influence such a move has had on English ability is difficult to say, however, Japan feels the need to improve English ability, motivation and confidence (MEXT, 2015).

It should be noted that the government has been moving away from using these TOEIC, TOEFL and Eiken step tests as benchmarks for language ability in favor of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) attainment benchmarks.

CEFR

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was published in 2001 as a contribution to the European year of Languages. Since publication, its influence at a global level has been significant and the implications for Japan are considerable. As mentioned above, the government has moved to using the CEFR Council of Europe (2001) attainment benchmarks levels A1 (Basic) to C2 (Proficient) which are based on the use of 'Can-Do' descriptors.

CEFR had identified the five domains for language assessment as listening, speaking (interaction), speaking (production), reading and writing. The following are sample descriptors from the Common Reference Levels Self-assessment grid (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 26) showing the differences between the speaking domains of interaction and production and difference in levels.

Spoken Interaction

A1: I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.

B1: I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g family, hobbies, work, travel and current events). (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 26)

Spoken Production

A1: I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.

B1 : I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes & ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions. (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 26)

As can be seen, interaction requires more impromptu language use whilst production would require a little more organization of ideas. Also, we can see how the focus of assessment moves from what students know about the language to what they can actually do with it.

The influence of CEFR on language attainment goals in Japan, as noted by Majima (2010), Haida (2020), MEXT kenshu (2017), and Nishimura-Sahi (2020), can be seen to be significant. Annual government surveys (MEXT, 2018, MEXT, 2019） also show that schools across the country have developed their own ‘can-do lists’ to be used for attainment targets and which emphasize the shift in focus from knowledge and skills to the ability to apply such knowledge and skills in real contexts. The new CS also

emphasizes the ability to apply what has been learned, which has led to a shift in evaluation toward the performance skills.

Implementation of English at Elementary School

As can be seen in Table 1 below, the implementation of English at the elementary school level has been slowly increasing over the last 30 years. As Matsuka & Oshiro (2008) note, the implementation followed three main stages prior to the fourth stage in 2020. In the first stage (1992-2001), MEXT began by setting up pilot schools, first in Osaka in 1992 and then at least one research school in every prefecture in Japan. Despite issues related to teacher language and teaching skills, generally positive feedback was given by pilot schools (Fennelly, 2007), leading to the second stage (2002-2010) with the implementation of the 2002 CS including the introduction of the period of integrated studies. It was under this umbrella class including international understanding that English activities were first introduced as a part of a school subject. English activities quickly spread with over 90% of schools conducting some form of English activities, and a major problem became evident; the content and regularity of English classes varied greatly among schools, even those within the same junior high school catchment area.

Table 1

The Implementation of English at Elementary School

Stage 1	1992-2001	Research Schools in each Prefecture (weekly classes 1-6th grade)
Stage 2	2002-2010	English Activities within the Period of Integrated Studies Spreads to over 90% of schools, monthly classes, ALT/outside teachers' main role.
Stage 3	2011-2019	Foreign Language Activities as a Required Class 5th and 6th Grade. Weekly classes. Government materials. HRT more role. Improved English awareness and oral/aural skills noted. Problem with connection to JHS noted
Stage 4	2020-	3rd and 4th Grade FLA Required class. One class per week. 5th and 6th Grade English as an Official Subject. Two classes per week.

Adapted from Matsukawa and Oshiro (2008)

MEXT responded to these problems with a new CS outlined in 2008, (stage 3, 2011-2019) which prescribed uniform, once-a-week Foreign Language Activity classes using

government-developed materials and syllabi for fifth and sixth grade students. Surveys to evaluate the success of these classes (MEXT, 2016) noted improvements in students' attitudes and communicative skills; however little real measured increase in English ability was noted. A significant problem which became apparent was the gap between the oral/aural based elementary school classes and reading-writing based junior high school classes. These results influenced aspects of the present CS (stage 4) whereby students receive 140 hours of English (as a subject) over two years in the fifth and sixth grade, including and introduction to reading and writing, following 70 hours of oral/aural instruction in Foreign Language Activities classes in the third and fourth grades.

The New Course of Study

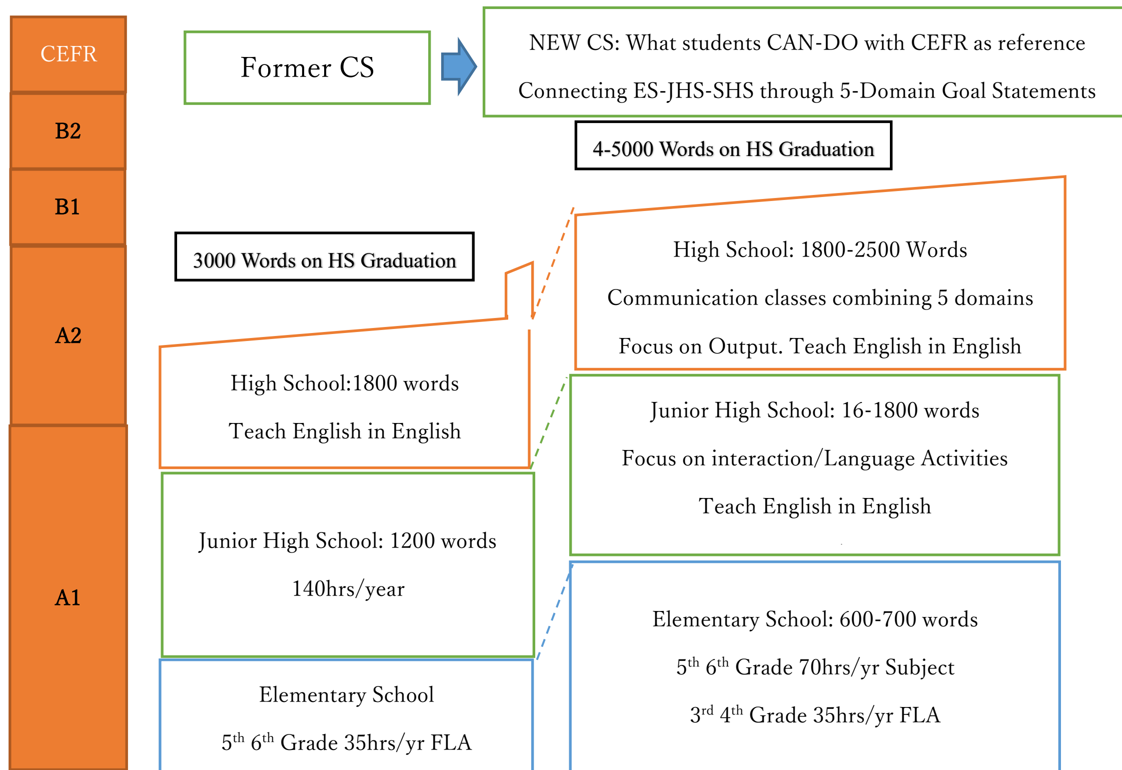
In order to foster the competencies for living in the future society MEXT (2017c) outlined three main pillars as the foundation for the new CS as follows: "***Knowledge and Skills;*** what you know and what you can do! ***Abilities to Think, Make Judgements and Express themselves;*** how you use your knowledge and ability, and ***Willingness to learn, Sense of Humanity;*** how you interact with society and the word". Through educational activities during which students apply the knowledge and skills they have attained to think, make judgements and express themselves, it is hoped that the students will develop the ability to interact with a global, ever changing society.

For foreign language study, the students are to cover five domains: Listening, Speaking (Interaction), Speaking (Production), Reading (from 5th grade), Writing (from 5th grade). Proactive, interactive and deep active learning is also emphasized. Again, the influence of CEFR on Japanese language policy can be noted. As can been seen in Figure 1 below, government attainment goals on the left side of the figure are aligned to CEFR standards.

Figure 1 shows that a significant increase in language attainment is aimed for under the new CS. The increase in the number of vocabulary words to be covered is, it is hoped, to aid in-depth communication. Educational goal statements from elementary school through high school are aligned to show common goals, and new University Entrance Exams (Kyoutsu Test) introduced in January 2021, expect students to 'think, make judgements and express themselves'.

Figure 1

MEXT Image for Foreign Language Education



(adapted from MEXT, 2017a)

Course of Study Goals

The goal statements for the foreign language activities and education at the 3rd and 4th grade level of elementary school, the 5th and 6th grade level of elementary school and the junior high school level are outlined below.

3rd & 4th Grade Foreign Language Activities Goal:

"To develop pupils' competencies that form the foundation of communication as outlined below through language activities of listening and speaking in a foreign language, while activating the approaches of communication, in foreign languages".

(Translated from MEXT 2017b, p. 11)

5th and 6th Grade Foreign Language Goal:

"To develop the pupils' competencies that form the base of communication as outlined below through language activities of listening, reading, speaking, and writing in a foreign language, while activating the approaches of communication foreign languages."

(Translated from MEXT 2017b, p. 67)

As can be seen, the goal for language education is increasingly developed “competencies for communication” in foreign language. Common terminology can be noted as follows:

「activating the approaches of communication」「Through language activities」

In order for teachers and teacher trainers to apply the new course of study at elementary school it is important that these main points of the CS are fully understood

Approaches of Communication

*“*Activating the approaches of communication*”* is described by MEXT as follows (MEXT, 2017b, p. 11). “Taking into consideration the nationality, the culture, traditions and lifestyle of, and your relation to, the person with whom you are communicating”.
In order to achieve this, MEXT (2017b) continues to stress the importance, at the classroom level, of teachers clarifying the **Goal, Setting and Situation** for language use and also specify with whom the students will communicate. This is a move to contextualize language in real situations with real goals and a move away from traditional contrived form-focused instruction. For example, when asking students to do a presentation such as introducing their hometown, it is important to identify true goals of the presentation and specify who the students will be presenting to and what they hope to achieve through the presentation. Presenting about the local area to an ALT who lives in that area and presenting the local area to children in another country would activate very different perspectives and approaches. This would influence lexis, content, and how we communicate. Taking language out of context for practice is not thought to be beneficial when developing competencies for communication. When adapting teaching content to local contexts teachers need to be aware of these changes.

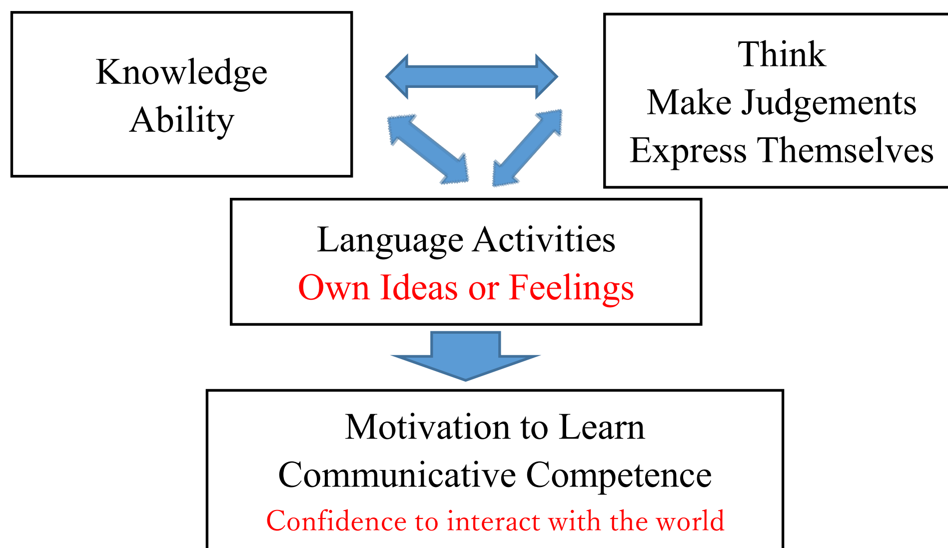
Language Activities

Another example of common terminology throughout the Course of Study goals is *through language activities* whereby the MEXT is outlining learning practices. Under the new CS, there has been a shift in the definition of *language activities.* Traditionally, in previous versions of the CS, *language activities* is a term which has been used to describe activities preparing for and conducting communication. Under the new CS, the definition of language activities is outlined as follows: *Activities through which students exchange their own ideas and feelings* (MEXT Kenshu, 2017). Language practice such as chants, pronunciation practice, drills, controlled practice and repetition, though perhaps important, are not considered to be language activities. Real language for real goals

through which students express their own ideas and feelings in context are to be the process through which students learn. This is a significant shift away from traditional audio-linguistic pattern practice, drill-based form-focused classes. As Figure 2 below shows, it is hoped that students will "think, make judgements and express themselves" applying the "knowledge and abilities" they have acquired during aforementioned language activities. Through these "language activities", it is hoped that students will acquire further knowledge and ability which they can apply in future language activities, ultimately developing motivation and confidence in language to interact with the world.

Figure 2

The Central Role of Language Activities



Adapted from Yoshida (2018)

If the new CS is to be successful, it is essential that teachers and teacher trainers alike are aware of the change in approach implied by figure 2. The CS does offer outlines of language activities suitable for each domain and at each level. Those for speaking (Interaction) are as follows:

b. Speaking [Interaction]

(a) Activities to exchange greetings with strangers and acquaintances, give instruction and make requests to the person they are communicating with and respond to or refuse them.

(b) Activities to communicate their own thoughts and feelings and ask and answer simple questions regarding familiar and simple topics in everyday life.

(c) Activities to have brief conversations by answering simple questions about themselves on the spot and asking simple questions about the person they are communicating with on the spot.

(Translated from MEXT 2017b, p.106-108

Small Talk

In line with the introduction of the new CS at the elementary school level, the government produced a guidebook (MEXT Kenshu, 2017) to help teachers understand the CS and prepare for classes. One example of language activities, implemented in classrooms around the country, is "*small talk*" The guidebook outlines goals for "small talk" as follows: To encourage language retention through opportunities to use vocabulary and phrases covered in the curriculum and develop skills to continue discourse and impromptu language use. Two different styles of "small talk" are described in the guidebook, teacher-led discourse and student chat-type activities. Through the longer teacher-led discourse, it is hoped that language can be contextualized and that students can infer meaning from context. Through chat-type activities, it is hoped that students will develop discourse skills and improve their language retention through cyclically repeated use of language related to familiar topics.

Sample:

UNIT 2 Welcome to Japan

S1: What country do you want to go to? Where do you want to go?

S2: I want to go to Italy.

S1: You want to go to Italy? That sounds nice. Why?

S2: I want to go to Canada.

S1: You want to go to Canada? That's nice. Why?

S2: Canada is very beautiful.

(MEXT Kenshu 2017, p. 133)

In this way, students develop discourse skills through communicative shadowing, reacting, and asking follow-up questions. Reacting to impromptu questions also helps prepare students for more in-depth interaction at the junior high level.

5-Domains

Under the goal statements for the new CS, goal statements for each of the 5 domains are also outlined at each stage. The goals for Speaking (Interaction) are outlined below:

(1)Speaking [Interaction]

a. Enable pupils to give instruction, make requests and respond using basic expressions.
b. Enable pupils to exchange their own thoughts and feelings regarding familiar and simple topics in everyday life by using simple words, phrases and basic expressions.
c. Enable pupils to communicate through asking and answering questions about themselves, the person they are communicating with and their surroundings by using simple words and phrases and basic expressions on the spot.

(Translated from MEXT 2017b, p.78-79)

In this way the new CS has statements outlining what the students should be able to do with language in each domain at each stage of their education, emphasizing a shift to real language use in the classroom.

Implications

This move to using real language as a mode for teaching was described by Richards and Rogers (2014) as a move from "Learning to communicate to Communicating to learn". It is hoped that while using real language students will 'notice' new language and language forms through aforesaid language activities. For this paradigm shift in classroom practices in Japan to succeed true understanding of CS goals is important.

In Fennelly and Luxton (2011) the authors noted that "Many teacher trainers do not seem to understand the MEXT goals adequately and are putting emphasis on the teaching of English rather than developing a communicative experience for students". (p. 22)

With more ambitious goals under the new CS, the understanding of teacher trainers is an increasingly important aspect of the change. It is hoped that MEXT will provide more information on the goals and the content of the CS in English for native-speakingteachers and teacher trainers.

Conclusion

The most recent Course of Study was implemented at elementary school in 2020, at junior high school in 2021 and is to be introduced at high school in 2022. The new CS attempts to address dissatisfaction with English levels, an aging and increasingly global and changing society, and expected change for children's futures with the advances in AI.

As all government approved textbooks and materials must follow the CS it is important that teachers and teacher trainers alike be fully aware of the philosophies and goals of the CS. Significant influence from CEFR has been noted, particularly in the area of CAN-DO style goal statements and the introduction of CAN-DO lists in schools nationally. Also, following CEFR guidelines the new CS has divided speaking into the domains of interaction and production.

Notably, two main points throughout the new Courses of Study at all levels are "activating the approaches of communication" and teaching "through language activities". This will require the contextualizing of language at the classroom level while giving students the opportunity to exchange their own ideas and feelings through real language use.

The use of "language activities" as a method of learning through communication is important to develop students' abilities to "think, make judgements and express themselves", and develop the "confidence to interact with the world". At the classroom level, teachers need to be aware of the "goal, setting, and situation" for activities so that students can exchange their own ideas and feelings through meaningful and authentic language activities in context.

Bio Data

Mark G. Fennelly is a professor at Shikoku University. He has over 30 years of experience teaching and teacher training in Japan since 1990. He has been involved in the production of government and textbook materials related to and based on the Course of Study.

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Tabletop Games and Language Tasks in the EFL Classroom[1]

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Abstract

Tabletop (board or card) games can be an effective tool in the language classroom, if considered and used properly. They offer many benefits, communicative and otherwise, and can be adapted for a wide variety of learners and contexts. This paper will address the merits of language practice with games, as well as a brief history of the changes from classic to modern games. The language functions of tabletop games will be explored, followed by an analysis of several specifically communicative games. Finally, opportunities for students to engage with language both pre- and post-game will be suggested, and important points about teacher roles and challenges in using games will be covered.

テーブルトップゲーム（ボードゲームまたはカードゲーム）は、適切に検討および利用されれば、語学のクラスで効果的なツールになる可能性がある。 それらは、コミュニケーションやその他の多くの利点を提供し、さまざまな学習者や状況に適応させることができる。 本論文では、ゲームを使用した言語練習のメリットと、クラシックゲームからモダンゲームへの移行の簡単な歴史について論じる。 テーブルトップゲームの言語機能を探求し、続いていくつかの具体的なコミュニケーションを必要とするゲームを分析する。 最後に、ゲーム前とゲーム後の両方で生徒が言語に取り組む機会を提案し、ゲームを使用する際の教師の役割と課題に関する重要なポイントについても網羅する。

Keywords: Board games, language functions, communicative tasks

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Games used for language learning have been a fixture in classrooms for many years. In preschool lessons through university-level courses and programs for English for specific purposes, games can be found in nearly all types of syllabi. The use of games is well established, ranging from short warm-up activities to the main focus for task-based lessons, and their benefits for learners have been documented in much academic research (Fotini & Makrina, 2017; Smith, 2006).

How can a game, especially for the purposes of language practice, be characterized? Games are instances of play that are governed by clear rules and objectives. They are closed activities with an explicit beginning and end, and through their ludic elements generate enthusiasm and motivation in participants (Margineanu, 2003). Furthermore, language play has been shown to promote language learning (Bell, 2009) and proficiency. Formats vary greatly, from games that are entirely spoken or use only a piece of paper to digital games that require a video game console, computer, or tablet. In this paper I will focus on tabletop games, which include games that are played on boards and/or use a set of cards, as these combine the elements of authenticity, tactility, and social interaction which make them so effective as tools for language learning.

History of modern tabletop games

Many people today are familiar with board and card games. Classic games such as Monopoly and Candy Land have long been a part of rainy days and holidays spent with friends and family. Common to these games are simple, accessible rules, along with highly luck-based play structures (all movement dictated by the rolling of dice), leading to minimal player agency. Additionally, games can last for an indeterminate amount of time, and the winner is often made clear long before the end, resulting in lowered motivation and enjoyment for the remaining players.

The mid 1990s saw what is referred to by many as a “renaissance” in tabletop games with the introduction of games like Settlers of Catan (Kay, 2018). Catan is a popular example of the growth of “Eurogames”, so called because of their birthplace in Europe, especially France and Germany. This new movement brought a number of changes and improvements to the traditional game structure: pure luck replaced by strategy and player behavior, specific maximum play time based on set scores or finite resources, and final scores only calculated at the game’s end, ensuring continued player enthusiasm. Today, there are over 100,000 different tabletop games, with genres ranging from abstract and social deduction to dungeon-crawler and wargaming. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will focus on a few types that have strong communicative potential for the classroom.

Types of tabletop games

Most tabletop games are competitive in nature. Many of the oldest games in human history, including backgammon, chess, and go, set players against one another, with a clear win condition and a defined winner. In more recent times, cooperative games such as Pandemic and Forbidden Island have been introduced, requiring players to work together toward a common objective or goal. In most cases, all players must fulfill the win condition for the game to end favorably, encouraging teamwork and collaboration. The systems of the game itself work against the players, who will either win or lose together.

While every tabletop game can be said to be either competitive or cooperative in its design, there is a further division that can be explored: games that are communicative. While not a commonly discussed classification, this type should be of great interest to teachers who would like to introduce games into their classrooms. Simply put, communicative games are those in which players must communicate (usually but not exclusively verbally) with each other to play. Here, communication is a primary and essential aspect of gameplay, and without it the game cannot function. Though simple and popular games like Uno and snakes and ladders are commonly adapted and used in language lessons, at their core they are not communicative, as play can begin, progress, and end without meaningful communication taking place. Truly communicative games will compel players to interact with one another by exploring and practicing a number of functions of language, which shall next be discussed.

Benefits of tabletop games

Most tabletop games are authentic materials. That is to say, they have been designed with L1 users in mind, and are not specifically meant to be used for the purpose of learning a language. They are authentic in that they involve language that is not overly simplified or contrived. Though many games feature scenarios and settings that are fantastical in nature, the tasks and objectives of these games almost always require communication between players, using language functions that have real outcomes (Hadfield, 1999).

Along with authentic materials such as songs, movies, and magazine articles, games can be powerful motivators for learners who want to interact with language beyond the textbook (Treher, 2011). Indeed, for L2 learners, being able to enter into a space normally reserved for L1 users is both challenging and stimulating (Bell, 2009). Tabletop games can also be motivating by their visually stimulating and tactile nature. Many games are colorful, aesthetically attractive, and include interactive pieces such as player markers, coins, tokens, and illustrated cards.

Games are also intrinsically social and shared experiences, and require sustained face-to-face interaction, as opposed to digital games that are largely played alone through the use of a screen (Wrobetz, 2021). This aspect of tabletop games allows them to become effective tools for developing a number of social skills that go beyond pure language, particularly in the case of young children. These skills include listening to others, collaborating and working in a team, taking turns, assertiveness, and winning and losing graciously, among others (Couzin, 2002). For students of any age, playing these kinds of games can also be valuable for improving their interactional competence (Bowyer, 2021).

Going further beyond language for its own sake, games can fit well into a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach, as there are many examples of diverse cultural, historical, geographical, and scientific subjects featured in modern games (deHaan, 2019). Finally, tabletop games also have a place in task-based language teaching (TBLT) approaches, as the very nature of games is for participants to follow specific rules and steps in order to complete objectives. These objectives will often require the navigation of information and reasoning gaps, and even opinion gaps in some cases.

Language functions

Communicative games not only provide players with many chances to speak, but through their fundamental rule systems they necessitate turn-taking, thus giving each participant their turn in which to speak (Smith, 2006). This naturally leads to similar language forms being repeated, which itself creates a secure and relaxed atmosphere for the practice of speaking (Cook, 2000).

Halliday (1978) proposes seven functions of language for young learners as they develop verbal communication. These are heuristic, for seeking information and asking questions, imaginative, for telling stories and using creative language, personal, for expressing opinions or emotions, instrumental, for communicating needs, interactional, for forming relationships, regulatory, for giving commands and influencing the behavior of others, and representational, for giving facts and information. Though not all L2 students are young learners, these seven functions are useful for framing the kinds of communicative skills that any language learner should be actively working towards, and which tabletop games can create opportunities to practice.

A further three functions shall be added here, representing a few of the additional tasks that learners might engage in during gameplay, and which certainly have their place in authentic language usage. These are inference, for making a conclusion based on evidence, negotiation, for discussing with others to reach an agreement, and deception, for misleading and hiding the truth. A number of specific games will now be examined in detail, to illustrate the rich variety of communicative scenarios that this medium can offer teachers and students.

Game examples

Insider

Insider ("Insider - Oink Games," 2021) is a compact card-based game in which players take on one of three roles (see Appendix A). One player is the master, and knows a secret word. The other players are commoners, and must guess the word by asking the master questions, which can only be responded to with answers of yes or no. However, one of the commoners is secretly playing the third role of insider, and knows the word. The insider will try to help their fellow players by asking questions that might lead them to the correct answer, but must take care not to make their role as insider evident. Thus, the insider should choose questions that are neither too direct nor too vague. Once the word has been guessed (within a set period of time), then a discussion and vote takes place on who the insider might be. Points are awarded to the insider for the secret word being successfully guessed but their identity remaining hidden.

This game falls within the bluffing and deduction genre, and involves multiple language functions for the two stages of play. Initially, players will ask questions (heuristic) and draw their own conclusions (inference) to work out the secret word. The next stage raises the stakes, as players will argue and debate (negotiation) on the identity of the insider, while the true insider must direct suspicion away from themselves (deception). Insider is highly adaptable for the classroom, as teachers can create secret word sets based on concepts or vocabulary that they would like students to practice.

Dixit

Dixit ("Dixit - Libellud," 2021) is a game mainly consisting of a set of fully illustrated cards (see Appendix B). The images on the cards are often abstract, with no text. Players take turns to choose a card from their hand and give a hint about it without showing the other players. The rest of the players must then choose a card from their hands that they feel might also match the hint. The cards are then shuffled and displayed, and all players except for the hint-giver vote on which is the original card. Points are won for hints that are neither too easy nor too difficult (if all or no players guess the correct card, zero points are won).

There are many chances for the use of different language functions, particularly imaginative, but also personal and inference, as players may try to give hints that involve shared knowledge or experiences between only a portion of the group. Following up each round, teachers may choose to engage the students in a discussion of why a specific hint was given, inviting the sharing of memories and anecdotes.

Forbidden Island

Forbidden Island ("Forbidden Island - Gamewright," 2021) is a cooperative game in which players are explorers on an exotic and dangerous island (see Appendix C). Each player takes on the role of a pilot, diver, or engineer, among others, and uses their specialized skills to navigate the island, which is steadily sinking beneath the water. The explorers must plan their actions together and collaborate to locate four artifacts, collect them, and reach the escape point in time.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, in cooperative games like Forbidden Island, all players must win together, or they will lose together, so discussion and teamwork is crucial. Therefore, all the communicative functions of working in a group, such as instrumental, interactional, regulatory, and negotiation language must be utilized. Forbidden Island can be a stressful game as the players are often at a disadvantage against the rising waters, but teachers can create post-game opportunities for evaluation and strategizing for the next play session of the game.

Cat & Chocolate

Cat & Chocolate ("Cat & Chocolate - cosaic," 2013) is a simple game that relies on players' creativity and storytelling abilities. One set of cards provides scenarios with a specific challenge or danger, while a second set shows seemingly random objects and tools (see Appendix D). A player draws a scenario card, such as being locked in a room with ghosts in a haunted house, and then must tell a story about how they escape using the objects on the cards in their hand. After listening to each story, the rest of the players vote on whether they accept it or not, with the storyteller receiving a point for a majority vote. In a unique twist, player teams are not known or revealed until the conclusion of the game, so players are compelled to vote honestly based on the quality of the story, rather than team loyalty. Imaginative language is the primary function in this game, followed by possibilities for classroom discussion about each story, with ideas and suggestions from the other students.

Lasers & Feelings

Lasers & Feelings ("Lasers & Feelings - One.Seven Design," 2021) is a roleplaying game, requiring only paper, something to write with, and a few six-sided dice. Many

people have heard of games in this genre such as Dungeons and Dragons, but these can be daunting for new players and those unfamiliar with the concept. While most roleplaying games have complex rule systems and are designed to be played in successive campaigns over months and years, Lasers & Feelings is a "one-shot" game, with rules written on a single page and games lasting a few hours at most.

One player acts as the game-master, or narrator, and the other players each create a simple character that interacts within the narrator's setting. The outcomes of most actions are decided by a roll of the dice and the nature of that action, being technical and logical (the lasers side) or physical and emotional (the feelings side). While the game rules incorporate a science fiction backdrop, they are vague enough to accommodate any setting, and teachers may want to suggest a theme that will be engaging to their students. Like all roleplaying games, Lasers and Feelings requires highly imaginative and interactional language from participants, but also offers a valuable chance to create and explore identities within the safe and controlled space of the game.

All of the games described here can be effective tools for generating authentic and dynamic language through a variety of functions. With some careful consideration, teachers can modify and adapt the games for their classrooms, and can search out alternatives for those that may be difficult to acquire. However, the possibilities for language usage do not begin and end with playing the game. There are a number of tasks that learners might be directed in for both pre-game and post-game practice, which shall now be discussed.

Pre-game language opportunities

Just as an L1 user would do when presented with a new game, the set-up and rules of the game must first be learned by the teacher and students. Instruction booklets are authentic materials, and can be a good source of regulatory and representational language (deHaan, 2019). Additionally, like any hobby, tabletop games have their own unique jargon, which teachers may choose to address in their lessons (Bowyer, 2021). To support their comprehension of the rules and flow of gameplay, students might watch online videos that have been created for the purposes of explanation and modeling. These kinds of videos are also excellent examples of authentic materials, and can be used in conjunction with instruction booklets for practicing both reading and listening skills. Prior to playing a game, finally, predictions can be made and noted down, to be revisited post-game.

Post-game language opportunities

After a given play session, students can engage their experience with the game in a variety of communicative ways. A discussion of the game might be conducted, looking back on predictions that were made, documenting aspects that the players particularly liked or disliked, and assessing ways in which they could have changed their strategies in future sessions. Regarding these future sessions, students can create and propose "house rules", or alternative rules to make the game more enjoyable and either less difficult or more challenging. Many modern tabletop games have systems that are dynamic enough to encourage multiple playthroughs, so students can potentially receive a good deal of enjoyment and language practice from a single game.

Teachers may be interested in taking recordings of the play session and then analyzing language usage with their students, or having students create their own review and how-to-play videos, which can then be shared with later classes (deHaan, 2019). There are many online communities for tabletop enthusiasts, such as BoardGameGeek (BoardGameGeek, n.d.), which can be a further source of authentic language and offer possibilities for interaction with native speakers through discussions and reviews. Such communities are also an excellent resource for students to research and decide what games they might like to play in the future. Finally, sufficiently motivated students might try to design and produce their own original games, which can then be tested and commented on by their peers.

Roles and challenges for teachers

Students, of course, will engage with games as players, but what of the duties of the teacher? Games create a unique chance for teachers to step back from their part as the central focus and take on new roles, such as judge or moderator for competitive games. They can be a participant in the game, or a resource for students who might need support. Teachers might become models for how to play a game, or managers for a classroom that is playing multiple games at once. Finally, the role of assessor may be required, so that the teacher can offer useful feedback and error correction to their students. It is important to consider the timing of feedback, whether it is given during play or after the game, and if it is directed or in a general, summarized form.

Every teaching context is different, so teachers must evaluate numerous factors before introducing games into their classroom. Lesson time, class size, and access to materials are of primary concern, as well as the player limitations and difficulty levels of any given game (Wrobetz, 2021). Games may be useful and adaptable tools, but teachers have to first consider their students' needs and goals, and then determine if and how games might fit those goals (deHaan, 2019).

Conclusion

In this paper I have briefly described the history of modern tabletop games and a few of the common types of these games. This was followed by an explanation of the benefits for language learners as well as the functions of language that can be applied to games. Five examples of games were discussed, along with specific in-class techniques for engaging students further. Finally, a number of pre-game and post-game language opportunities were proposed, and consideration was given to teacher roles and the challenges of using games.

Tabletop games can be an active and motivating resource for the EFL classroom. They can offer interesting scenarios for discussion and debate, and give students opportunities to practice language functions and explore roles that would be difficult (and potentially risky) in real-world situations. Games are authentic materials that are becoming increasingly mainstream in popular culture, and language learners can benefit greatly from engaging with them and familiarizing themselves with a variety of contexts and systems. Additionally, they are compelling motivators, visually and tactilely stimulating, and they provide opportunities for the development of social skills and interaction. However, teachers must carefully consider the abilities and needs of their students before bringing games into their lessons, and be aware of the limitations of games not inherently designed for large groups.

Bio Data

Martin Sedaghat is an English instructor at the Niigata University of Health and Welfare International Preschool. His research interests include game design and implementation in language learning, picture books for SLA, and language development in young learners.

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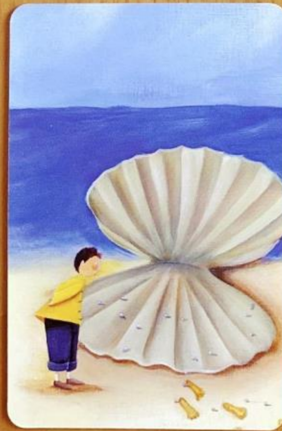
Appendix A
Insider cards

Appendix B
Dixit cards



Appendix C
Forbidden Island cards and pieces

Appendix D
Cat & Chocolate cards