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Title
Drill no Tetsujin: Communicative na Drill kara Role-play e (The Expert of Drills: From Communicative Drills to Role-Plays)

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8n47p2kk

Journal
Issues in Applied Linguistics, 9(2)

ISSN
1050-4273

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Publication Date
1998-12-30

DOI
10.5070/L492005279

Peer reviewed

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Drill no Tetsujin: Communicative na Drill kara Role-play e (The Expert of Drills: From Communicative Drills to Role-Plays) by Sinichiro Yokomizo.
Tokyo: Alc co, 1997, 225 pp.

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An experienced teacher knows that mechanical drills alone cannot provide satisfactory results in a foreign language classroom. Drills tend to be a dull activity, often creating considerable strain on both teachers and students. Students quickly lose their motivation for speech, if they simply parrot certain speech patterns when the teacher gives the cue. Another criticism of mechanical drills is that students are often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through drills to actual communication (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Canale, 1983; Omaggio, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Takamizawa, 1989).

Since the Communicative Approach (instruction oriented toward communication-based activities rather than grammar drills) was introduced into JFL (Japanese as a foreign language), teachers in the field have adapted numerous task-oriented activities as well as role-plays by either replacing the mechanical drills, or combining the communicative activities with the existing mechanical drills. However, the new approach has not delivered the expected results. When teachers replace mechanical drills and use only task-oriented activities and role-plays, students cannot develop a strong foundation to perform communicative tasks. When teachers attempt to combine mechanical drills and communicative activities, the gap between the two is not bridged successfully, and students fail to perform the tasks and role-plays. An even worse case scenario is that through role-play and simulation type exercises, the students end up practicing forms that are not useful or are actually inaccurate (Okazaki & Okazaki, 1990; NFLC, 1993; Nishiguchi, 1995). How can we make communicative activities work in the classroom? This book provides an answer.

Drill no Tetsujin offers specific and practical guidelines to construct 'communicative drills' for elementary Japanese language classrooms. The author, Sinichiro Yokomizo, advocates communicative drills, which he calls "Contextualized Exercises," for the following reasons: (1) Forming a sentence and being able to use it in actual communication are not the same, and it is the teacher's responsibility to show the students "when" and "how" to use the learned sentence through the communicative drills; (2) Mechanical pattern drills can become monotonous, but the communicative drills enable students to use the pattern in a meaningful context; (3) We cannot expect a smooth transition from mechanical drills to

Issues in Applied Linguistics
ISSN 1050-4273
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Vol. 9 No. 2, 183-187

role-plays, but the communicative drills can act as a bridge between the two stages.

The book consists of seven chapters: 1. Drill to wa? (What are the drills?); 2. Drill o communicative ni suru tame no kufuu (How to make drills communicative); 3. "Context no naka de no renshuu" no ichi (When to conduct "Contextualized Exercises"?); 4. "Context no naka de no renshuu" no jitsurei (Examples of "Contextualized Exercises."); 5. Kyooshitsu katsudoo ni okeru "context no naka de no renshuu" no ichi (When to conduct "Contextualized Exercises" in classroom activities); 6. Fukushuu you no bamen renshuu (Situational Exercises for Review); 7. "Context no naka de no renshuu" no ato no role-play (The role-plays after "Contextualized Exercises"). Overall, the book is well-organized and attractively presented. Each chapter begins with a careful preview of the author's discussion, and is followed by precise explanations with examples that include sample drawings (visual aids), and then ends with practical suggestions.

In the introductory chapter, Yokomizo presents the various types of mechanical drills and their drawbacks, which sets the stage for the discussion in the following chapter. Chapter 2 demonstrates how to make mechanical drills communicative. Tetsujin ("the Expert"), as the author refers to himself, provides eight valuable suggestions on how to turn a simple "Response Drill," such as "Takai desu ka?," "Hai, takai desu," ("Is it expensive?," "Yes it is.") into a communicative drill: 1. Always provide a context (contextualize); 2. Make sure the context is understood by everyone; 3. Have the students play both sides (not only answers, but questions); 4. Do not limit the dialogue to "Question and Answer"; 5. Provide several variable contexts in each grammar pattern; 6. The grammar pattern may be included either in the first speaker's utterances or the second; 7. Provide feedback, especially on pronunciation; 8. Expand the dialogues.

The following example illustrates a sequence in a classroom from the introduction of a grammar pattern to its application in role-plays . The sequence begins with a clear demonstration of a grammar pattern followed by a thorough explanation of its meaning and function; and it offers practice through mechanical drills. Before the communicative approach was introduced into Japanese language teaching, this sequence was the common procedure. Since the 1980's, role-plays and task oriented activities have been used after the above sequence; however, a number of teachers have found the results unsatisfactory. The author claims that "Contextualized Exercises" must come between the mechanical drills and the role-plays to minimize the gap between the two stages. The author further discusses the relation between "Contextualized Exercises" and the three processes of the communicative approach (Information Gap, Choice, and Feedback).

Chapter 4, which comprises more than half of the book, is filled with ready-to-use examples of "Contextualized Exercises." This section addresses 18 important grammar patterns; each contains a brief analysis of the grammar, several examples of "Contextualized Exercises" including how to expand these examples, and finally practical suggestions from "the Expert" (the author). Although it does not cover as many grammar patterns as Miura's (1983) Syokyuu Drill no Tsukurikata

(The way to construct drills for the beginning level), the author successfully demonstrates his techniques to make simple mechanical drills more communicative.

In the next chapter Yokomizo offers examples to support his viewpoint on the sequence in a classroom (Chapter 3). He uses the "verb + koto ga aru" (expressing past experience) pattern to guide us through the model class (from the grammar introduction to mechanical drills to contextualized exercises, and finally, to situational tasks and role-plays.) Once again, the author emphasizes the significance of showing the students "when" and "how" to use the learned sentence through communicative drills.

In Chapter 6, "Situational Exercises for Review," the author combines several contextualized exercises to construct a story, and discusses how to design a lesson plan around this activity. In this chapter he defines 'situational exercises' as stories (or realistic situations) that contain the grammar patterns and vocabulary taught in the chapter. The author goes on to discuss the purpose of these exercises and gives two example stories utilizing the grammar patterns from lessons 8 and 21 of the widely used textbook, Japanese: the Spoken Language (Jorden & Noda, 1987). The author claims that a lesson such as this is meaningful after each chapter because: (1) the students can review what they have learned in the chapter; (2) this review reinforces learned grammar patterns and vocabulary; and (3) the instructor can find out how well the students have acquired the skills taught in the chapter.

The final chapter of the book discusses role-plays and provides examples of the varying types of information that the teacher can give the students: 1. an unfinished segment of dialogue; 2. place, situation, characters, expressions and vocabulary; 3. place, situation, characters; 4. characters and instructions (what to do for each sentence) 5. place, situation, characters, and the goal of the exercise; 6. a problematic situation. The chapter then proceeds to discuss the relationship between these role-plays and the three processes of the communicative approach (Information Gap, Choice, and Feedback).

Yokomizo claims that the type 3 role-plays (providing the students with place, situation, and characters) are the most effective after "Contextualized Exercises" because the flow of the conversation is up to the students. Therefore, it provides the students with an opportunity to begin the conversation under certain circumstances, develop the conversation while listening carefully to each other, and end the conversation appropriately. These three elements are necessary for effective communication in the real world. The author further indicates more characteristics of the type 3 role-plays and offers a few examples. Finally, other useful notes for instructors are provided in conjunction with the results of surveys given to the students. The results show that students also recognize the effectiveness of the role-plays.

In sum, Drill no Tetsujin is a valuable resource for teachers of Japanese. It is particularly helpful for novice teachers since the author clearly demonstrates a way to construct communicative drills in a step-by-step manner. Experienced teachers may find some of the suggestions in this book trivial (for example, 'put the

visual aids away soon after finishing the dialogue so as not to confuse the students in the next dialogue'); however, if I look back to my first teaching experience, I can recall that I thought about such mundane matters. Veteran teachers can also learn a great deal from this book. Chapter 6 is particularly useful for experienced teachers because I believe that constructing situational exercises is the most challenging, yet rewarding, project for an instructor. As the author suggests, s/he gets the opportunity to play three roles: producer (constructing a realistic story by combining as many learned grammar patterns and vocabulary as possible), director (observing the students' performances and providing them with appropriate feedback), and actor (becoming a character in the story). The students can enter into a natural conversation by simulating realistic situations, which helps for a smooth transition to the next step, the role-plays and task-oriented activities.

The value of this book lies in the author's clear and thorough presentation of how to turn a simple mechanical drill into a more meaningful communicative drill. As Jorden & Walton (1987) claim, "Japanese is a truly foreign language." The grammatical structure and the use of words are radically different from English. According to the Defense Language Institute, Japanese is a Category IV Language (1,320 hours of instruction required to reach a certain level of proficiency), whereas some Western European languages, such as French and Spanish belong to Category I (450 hours of instruction). Therefore, teachers of Japanese should be careful when using task activities and role-plays in their classrooms even though the same activities may have yielded successful results in French and Spanish classes (NFLC, 1993). Because of the nature of the Japanese language, an extra step is needed before employing communicative tasks (Okazaki & Okazaki, 1990).

Drill no Tetsujin has made an important contribution to the field of Japanese language teaching. New teachers will benefit significantly from the precise description of the author's techniques to make mechanical drills more communicative. Yokomizo demonstrates his techniques in such a gradual manner and with such ready-to-use examples that even inexperienced teachers (and their students) can benefit from them immediately. Experienced teachers can also appreciate the ideas in this book and incorporate them into their own teaching.

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