Teaching Pragmatics
in Japanese Junior High School

Analysis of "The Carpenter's Gift"

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Abstract

English language education in Japan has focused on communicative competence for years. Successful communication can be enhanced by the study of linguistic pragmatics. However, it seems to be difficult to practice teaching pragmatics at public junior high schools. Several studies in pragmatics point out that it is not fully introduced in authorized junior high school textbooks. In fact, junior high school teachers might not regard pragmatics as important. Therefore, it is significant to increase teachers' awareness of pragmatics and to recognize the potential role of textbooks in teaching pragmatics to help students learn to communicate in real situations. The aforementioned studies analyzed how pragmatics would be introduced in authorized textbooks; however, the studies have not mentioned how to handle pragmatics in teaching English. Therefore, in this paper the researcher focuses on three speech acts: requests, refusals, and apologies. The researcher also analyzes the story, "The Carpenter's Gift", in the textbook, *NEW HORIZON English Course 2* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2015), in an attempt to indicate how junior high school teachers in Japan can teach pragmatics and what kind of instruction can be achieved through the use of textbooks. It is the hope of the researcher that this paper will help raise awareness of the teaching of pragmatics.

English language education in Japan is intended to highlight communicative competence. According to the guidelines for *the Course of Study* for Junior High School proposed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2017, p.11) of Japan, the aim of foreign language education is to cultivate the quality or ability of interactive communication.

Communication is ongoing and occurs in many interactions simultaneously. It takes place not only in one direction but both directions. Therefore, people need to play roles of both a sender and a receiver. Interactive communication is important to establish interpersonal relationships.

One goal of language functions is to help make communication smooth (MEXT, 2017, p.72). This means that interlocutors can start communication easily and communicate continuously, building up the relationship. The Ministry's official guidelines for school teaching describes some examples: greeting, getting someone's attention, or introducing a speech act, for example, "Excuse me." or "May I ask you a favor?", sympathizing, making appropriate responses such as "I see.", "Really?", or "Sounds interesting.", indicating a need for repetition, for example, "Pardon me?", and repeating the words to carry on a conversation. Such speech acts that help produce successful communication are related to the study of linguistic pragmatics.

Speech act belongs to the domain of pragmatics (Deep, 2013). He explained that pragmatics is the study of meaning in situation or in context. It is the study of language used by real people in the real context. Therefore, it is important that students learn

pragmatic knowledge and practice interactive communication in real situations to make communication smooth.

However, it seems to be difficult to teach pragmatics in English classes in Japanese junior high schools. In the Japanese educational system, textbooks authorized by MEXT are used in public junior high schools. In other words, teachers cannot freely choose the textbooks that they want to use. Many researchers have analyzed and argued about the authorized textbooks and point out that pragmatics is not fully introduced in the textbooks used in junior high school (Hiasa, 2014; Koyama, 2013; Yamato & Adachi, 2015). Therefore, most teachers would not include pragmatics in their teaching of English. Through the researcher's teaching experience at junior high school, the emphasis of textbooks is grammar, vocabulary, and reading content. English teachers believe that it is important to teach grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. The main purpose of the class is to acquire English proficiency to pass the entrance examination for high school. As a result, second language learners at junior high schools would have little chance to learn pragmatics when they learn English. That is the present situation in Japanese education. This issue does not seem to be caused by only the textbooks. It may be argued that junior high school teachers should enhance the awareness of pragmatics.

In order to achieve the aims set by MEXT, junior high school teachers should place emphasis on teaching pragmatics. Though pragmatics may not be displayed as the main topic in junior high school textbooks, teachers can use materials from the textbooks to

teach students about aspects of pragmatics. In this paper, the researcher suggests an idea of how teachers can teach pragmatics through this reading material, "The Carpenter's Gift" in the textbook, *NEW HORIZON English Course 2* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2015).

Background

Literature Review

Koyama (2013) stressed that the purpose of English education is not only to teach knowledge of the language but also to help students develop communicative competence. She analyzed the English textbook series *NEW CROWN* (Sanseido, 2012) used in junior high school and examined the importance of pragmatic knowledge in teaching English. Koyama reported that a lot of expressions related to communication are seen in the textbooks and the expressions of asking permission such as "Can I ～ ?" and making a request like "Can you ～ ?" are typically used in the textbooks. She concluded as follows: it is desirable that students learn how to communicate using pragmatic knowledge automatically. In addition, teachers should teach pragmatics to students emphatically and satisfactorily.

Hiasa (2014) emphasized language functions and analyzed the conversation comparing six old and new textbooks for ninth graders authorized by MEXT. She concluded that the expression of language functions is not directly taught as the main topic but most of them are seen at the beginning or the end of the textbooks. In addition, it is difficult to acquire comprehensive pragmatic knowledge when these expressions are not integrated

into the lessons. Hiasa suggested that we should reconsider the role of textbooks from the perspective of pragmatics and discuss this important issue.

Yamato and Adachi (2015) analyzed the contents of textbook series *SUNSHINE English Course* (Kairyudo, 2015), focusing on language functions. These two researchers mentioned that pragmatics is not fully integrated into the textbooks; therefore, teachers should not overly rely on the textbooks to teach pragmatics.

As the discussion above indicates, pragmatics is not a major topic in the English textbooks of Japanese junior high schools. Indeed, it is difficult to teach communicative competence through textbooks. However, teachers have the responsibility to teach students pragmatics to help students learn to communicate in real situations. It may be said that junior high school teachers should spare time to teach pragmatics in teaching English if they were aware of its significance. The above studies do not mention how to handle pragmatics in teaching English. Therefore, an example of how to manage pragmatics, specifically speech acts, will be discussed in this study.

Technical Terms of Pragmatics

Speech Acts

Speech acts are acts that can, but need not be, carried out by saying and meaning that one is doing so (Green, 2016). Speech-act theory was introduced in 1975 by Oxford philosopher, John Austin and further developed by American philosopher, John Searle.

Speech acts are divided into three categories: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is what a person actually says; an illocutionary act is what the speaker means or intends; a perlocutionary act is the effect of the utterance.

Speech acts encompass requests and refusals in the real context. These two factors can be divided into direct and indirect speech acts. A direct speech act is one in which the locutionary and illocutionary act are the same. For example, a speaker says, "Close the door.", the locutionary act is a request, and the illocutionary act is also a request. On the other hand, in an indirect speech act, the locutionary act and the illocutionary act are different. The illocutionary act effects some outcome. For instance, a speaker says, "Can you help me with my homework?", the locutionary act is a question to ask the ability to help the speaker's homework. The illocutionary act could be a request, so this is an indirect speech act. Requests like "Can you help me?" or "Would you mind helping me?" are called conventionally indirect requests. The perlocutionary act depends on the illocutionary act. That is, if a listener says, "Sure." Then, the perlocutionary act is that the listener would help the speaker. If a listener says, "I think you should do it by yourself. If you have a question, ask me anytime." The speaker would do his homework by himself. Speech acts is important factor in communication. If both the speaker (sender) and the listener (receiver) can understand the other's intent, their communication would be successful.

Levels of Politeness and Making a Request

When making a request, a speaker chooses a level of politeness based on the size of request, relative status, and familiarity. When a speaker fails to choose an appropriate level of politeness, the relationship can be damaged. Two types of politeness strategies are positive politeness and negative politeness. When a speaker uses positive politeness, it emphasizes that the speaker and listener are part of the same group. Positive politeness strategies include being optimistic, exaggerating interest in the listener, sympathizing with the listener, using a nickname, and so on. On the other hand, negative politeness strategies indicate a distance between the speaker and listener and that the listener has no obligation to the speaker. Negative politeness strategies include asking permission; using a question form, being conventionally indirect (Could you…?), apologizing, and so on.

Refusals

When refusing a request, using refusal strategies increases the chance that the relationship will not be damaged and that the listener will not be offended by the refusal. The aim of using strategies is to mitigate the refusal using expressions such as hesitation devices, apologies, justification, expressing willingness, suggesting an alternative, promise of future agreement, and postponement or hedges. In addition, not only the verbal strategies but also the non-verbal strategies have great influence on their communication. Non-verbal elements such as facial expression, volume, tone of voice, speed, eye contact and smiling help soften

the refusals.

Apologies

An apology is a speech act whose purpose is to repair human relationships. In addition to the apology itself (I'm sorry, I apologize, etc.), apologies include strategies that can help in mending the relationship, such as offering a repair, taking responsibility, or offering an explanation.

Analysis in "The Carpenter's Gift"

"The Carpenter's Gift" is a reading in the textbook *NEW HORIZON English Course 2* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2015), for eighth graders in junior high school. This reading material does not have new grammar. Each sentence is short and simple. There are three characters: a man named Ben and a woman named Mary, who are good friends, and a carpenter named Pat.

The story will be divided into four parts and examples of speech acts will be explained. The three speech acts, requests, refusals, and apologies will be the focus on the analysis.

Mary lived in the country. Ben, her neighbor, was a good friend. One day, they found a cow.
Ben: Hey, that's my cow.
Mary: No, that's my cow.
Ben: What? Why do you think so?
Mary: It has the same short legs as my other cows.
Ben: No, Mary. It has the same long, black tail as my other cows. It's mine.

Mary: What are you saying? It's my cow!
(*After this little fight, Ben took the cow.*)

First, Mary and Ben each make an indirect request for the cow. These two utterances might not seem like requests, but they can be interpreted as requests: "Give me that cow." Using the locutionary acts, "*that's my cow.*" each of them insists that they own the cow and therefore should have it. The illocutionary act is "*Give me that cow.*" Possibly Ben and Mary used indirect requests because though they are close and of the same status, the cow is valuable property.

A week passed. Someone knocked at Mary's door.
Mary: Hello. Who are you?
Pat: Hello. I'm a traveling carpenter. Please call me Pat. I'm
    looking for work. Do you have any work for me?
Mary: Yes, Pat. Look at that small stream over there. Ben, my
    bad neighbor, made it last week.
Pat: Oh, you sound so angry.
Mary: Can you make a big fence along the stream? I don't want
    to see his face.
Pat: OK. No problem.

Second, a carpenter named Pat suddenly visits Mary. Pat makes a request. The utterance "*Do you have any work for me?*" is a request in the form of a question. They meet for the first time. The familiarity must be far; however, Pat looks friendly. What Pat says works positive politeness. It means that the utterance makes

their social distance close. Though the status is not clear, I would say that Mary's status would be a little higher because she is a potential customer, and Pat is looking for work.

Mary makes an indirect request. She says, "*Can you make a big fence along the stream?*" This is used a conventional indirectness. Mary uses polite expression because she has a benefit from Pat. The locutionary act is a question about the ability to make a big fence. The illocutionary act is a request.

> *Pat worked hard and fast. At sunset, he finished his work. Mary came to see it. She was very surprised.*
> *Mary: What's this?*
> *Pat: Well, I built a bridge over the stream.*
> *Mary: Why did you do that? Take down this bridge right now!*
> (*Then the door of Ben's house opened, and Ben came out of his house.*)
> *Ben: Wait! Don't take it down!*

Pat made a bridge rather than a fence. When Mary saw the bridge, she makes a direct request, "*Take down this bridge right now!*" The utterance is clear and an imperative. The level of politeness would be appropriate in the context of interaction. When Mary makes a request to make a big fence, Pat says, "*OK. No problem.*" From the perspective of speech acts, it might be interpreted that the locutionary act shows acceptance, the illocutionary act has two intentions: one is to agree to make a big fence; the other is to help Mary and Ben be friends again. Mary thinks that communication would be a failure because Pat did not

make a big fence; however, communication might be successful for Pat if he intends the latter meanings. Possibly it can be considered that Mary's use of the imperative has more to do with her anger than an analysis of locutionary and illocutionary acts.

Ben says, "*Wait! Don't take it down!*" The utterance is a kind of request. Here, too, Ben uses an imperative as an expression of his urgency — he wants to keep Pat from even beginning to tear down the bridge.

> *Ben ran across the bridge and came to talk to Mary.*
> *Ben:* <u>*I'm sorry about the cow, Mary. Please take it back, and be*</u>
>   <u>*my friend again. I don't want to lose your friendship.*</u>
> *Mary:* <u>*Oh, Ben. I don't want to lose yours, either.*</u>
> *Pat: Well, the bridge worked! You both look very happy.*
> *Mary: Thank you, Pat. You built a "bridge" between us.*
> *Ben: Yes.* <u>*Please stay here, Pat.*</u> *We have a lot of work for you.*
> *Pat:* <u>*Thank you, but I can't. I have many other bridges to build.*</u>
> (<u>*He left with a smile.*</u>)

Ben apologizes to Mary for a cow and shows an offer of repair. That might be an acceptance of responsibility. Although Mary did not say "*I'm sorry*," she sympathizes with Ben and repeats his words, "*I don't want to lose yours, either.*" Her utterance indicates that she is accepting his desire to repair their relationship.

Ben makes a request, "*Please stay here.*" It can be interpreted as a direct request. However, Pat refuses Ben's request. Pat uses a strategy of expressing appreciation and inability, "*Thank you, but I can't.*" Then, he offers a good reason "*I have many other bridges to*

build." He mitigates the refusal using justification. In addition, Pat uses non-verbal communication; his smiling helps soften the refusal.

How to Teach Pragmatics in English Class

Teaching Pragmatics Through "The Carpenter's Gift"

"The Carpenter's Gift" is included in *Let's Read* corner in the textbook. The *Let's Read* corner means that the main purpose of this reading is to learn reading comprehension and vocabulary items. Furthermore, I suppose that reading is to learn something from the story. A carpenter, Pat, arrives suddenly and acts as a go-between for Mary and Ben. He builds a bridge to help them repair their friendship. Based on this story, teachers can emphasize the importance of friendship, the importance of apologies, the meaning of bridge, and the existence of a carpenter, and so on. In the textbook, there are eight comprehension questions. In addition, only one question is related to pragmatics (see Table 1, Q8). It means that teachers have few chances of teaching pragmatics through textbooks.

With respect to pragmatics, it is important to make inferences about what a speaker intends. Students probably would not think about levels of politeness; why Mary uses the expression, "*Can you* ～ ?", not "*Please* ～ ," refusal strategies; why Pat adds a reason for his refusal. It may be argued that it is important for teachers to give students an opportunity to think about speech acts and their usage.

The researcher created some sample questions that could be

Table 1 *Question List About Pragmatics*

Write your ideas. Discuss with your group members in English.

Q1.   What do the words "*that's my cow*" intend?

Q2.   What is the relationship between Mary and Ben?

Q3.   Why are they quarreling?

Q4.   Pat said, "*Do you have any work for me?*" What does it intend?

Q5.   Explain the difference among the following expressions.

Make a big fence. / Please make a big fence. / Can you make a big fence? / Could you make a big fence, please?

Q6.   Imagine that you quarrel with your friend due to your utterance or actions.

When you apologize to your friend, what do you say? Add some reasons.

Q7.   Imagine that your teacher asks you to clean the classroom after school, but you have to go to *juku*. When you refuse the teacher's request, what do you say?

Q8.   Pat said, "*I have many other bridges to build.*" What is the purpose of this statement?

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used to help students make sense of the speech act usage in the story (see Table 1). Through this story, teachers can teach the three aspects of speech acts: requests (how to make a request including levels of politeness and the size of request, familiarity, and status), refusal strategies, and apologies.

As Koyama (2013) stated, students should learn about communicating in English and acquire the skills to develop communicative competence. Thus, it is necessary not only to learn but also apply their knowledge in practical situations. I believe

that it is significant to learn about pragmatics in practical contexts. In addition, group activities can be used effectively to help students come up with ideas. Thinking about the position of each character, their relationships, etc., helps students learn how to communicate successfully.

How Pragmatics Is Arranged Over Three Years

I looked at speech acts, focusing on requests, refusals, and apologies in the textbooks *NEW HORIZON English Course* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2015) in order to see what students are presented with. Each consists of two sections: the Unit Section and others. The Unit Section contains new vocabulary and grammar. Teachers think that the unit section is the most important. On the other hand, speech acts are listed as useful expressions in the *Daily Scene* section or *Let's Read* corner as "The Carpenter's Gift" is. They are allocated among the units.

Table 2 shows the list of requests, refusals, and apologies for three grades. As shown in Table 2, there are very few examples

Table 2 *List of Pragmatics: Requests, Apologies, and Refusals*

Pragmatics	Seventh Grade	Eighth Grade	Ninth Grade
Apologies	I'm sorry.		
Refusal		I'm sorry, but I can't.	No, thank you.
Requests	Can you set the table?	Could you take our picture?	May I speak to Meg, please?

Note. This is excerpted from *NEW HORIZON English Course* 3
     (Tokyo Shoseki, 2015), p.141.

and not much variety. Indeed, in *Daily Scene* section, as students go through the textbooks, the sentences become longer and new grammatical forms are added. It gives students a chance to learn polite expressions gradually. However, I think that the weaknesses of the list are the important issue that should be discussed.

Conclusion

This paper focused on teaching pragmatics using the material in the English textbooks used in Japanese junior high school. It attempted to provide some suggestions. First, there are several examples of speech acts in the story "The Carpenter's Gift." In addition, over three years, students can learn about speech acts and deepen their understanding of the context. Indeed, as Yamato and Adachi (2015) stated, there might be a problem with a lack of balance in frequencies. However, when teachers are aware of speech acts, they can teach about them making use of the material in textbooks that are chosen by the school. The researcher believes that such instruction is necessary to foster the ability to use speech acts appropriately and to be able to interpret them correctly. Accordingly, teachers should increase the students' awareness of speech acts. If teachers think speech acts are important, students will also learn the importance from their teachers.

In the case of our native language, we naturally would learn speech acts from parents and other people in our environment. However, when we learn other languages, it is necessary to consciously focus on speech acts and developing pragmatic

competence. From elementary school to high school, second language learners should keep learning about pragmatics, not only English class but also Japanese class and other subjects.

Communication involves contextual meanings or background information. What speakers say is not always what they mean. Therefore, it may be indispensable to learn about pragmatics and its application to our communication, and therefore, enhancing the awareness of pragmatic competence in communication is essential.

Acknowledgment

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