Speech Instruction and Communicative Competence:
Eliciting Learners' Speech in Remedial English Classes

SATO Mariko

Abstract

English education in Japan is becoming increasingly advanced, starting earlier and proceeding at an accelerating pace. Specific achievement targets have been set using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a benchmark, but the achievement rate remains less than satisfactory. Particularly, the results of speaking instruction, which has recently been emphasized, have been limited. In this context, this study assessed the quantity and quality of English utterances of 97 first-year university students based on the hypothesis that knowledge about communicative competence, especially strategic competence, will empower learners to draw on their speech knowledge. Participants received a short lecture on Canale and Swain's definition of communicative competence and the AAA technique, a method for improving strategic competence. Their verbal responses to a simple question were examined before and after the lecture. As the lecture did not address English knowledge, the participants' proficiency did not change. However, significant changes were noted in the quantity and quality of their utterances after they learned about communicative competence. These results provide new evidence that educating students about the nature of communicative competence is an important element of speaking instruction, especially in understanding and acquiring strategic competence.

Keywords: English education, strategic competence, turn-taking, eliciting speech

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Current Status of English Education in Secondary Education

Since the first numerical target for English language proficiency was set under the Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2002), the promotion of English education in Japan has been accelerating. The Third Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education (MEXT, 2018) set a target of 50% of high school graduates reaching level A2 or above of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). However, according to the "Report on the project to reform English education" (MEXT, 2017a), the average achievement level for the four specified skills was only 24.9%. The report summary states that the percentages of students achieving CEFR A2 level or above for listening, speaking, writing, and reading were only 33.6%, 12.9%, 19.6%,

and 12.9%, respectively. Table 1 shows the CEFR and distributions of scores for the four English skills at high school graduation based on the same report. The bold horizontal lines indicate the attainment targets set by MEXT. Clearly, many A1 level students' English proficiency remains at the junior high school level even after graduating high school. Particularly, achievement levels for the output skills of speaking and writing remain low.

Speaking instruction in English education in Japan has become increasingly important since 2008 when the Courses of Study first stated that the goal of foreign language learning is to develop communicative competence. Various reforms are underway, with the development of speaking skills being an overriding priority. For example, the government has been promoting classes in English as specified in the Courses of Study, considering the introduction of an external test to score speaking ability in the Common Test for University Admissions, and introducing the English Speaking Achievement Test for Junior High School Students to measure speaking ability in the Tokyo Metropolitan High School Entrance Examination (Education Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2022).

However, the overall results of these reforms have been unremarkable. In the project to reform English education, a four-skill English test was administered to 30,000 third-year high school students to measure CEFR A1 to B2 levels. For the speaking test, only 12.9% of the students achieved the target CEFR A2 level; furthermore, 18.8% scored zero, further indicating the need to improve the teaching of speaking. The speaking section of the English proficiency survey for the improvement of English education consists of three parts, namely, reading aloud (Part A), conversational exchange (Part B), and speech (Part C), with a total of five questions and a

Table 1

English Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading Levels of High School Students in Japan

Skill	CEFR level		Score range		N	%
Speaking	B1		14		1,357	1.2
	A2		10–13		13,759	11.7
	A1		0–9		102,758	87.1
		mean:	5.7	total	117,874	100
Writing	B2		105–140		2,461	0.3
	A2		70–100		129,404	19.3
	A1		0–65		540,223	80.4
		mean:	40.1	total:	672,088	100
Listening	B2		320		2,122	0.3
	B1		230–310		20,746	3.2
	A2		140–220		202,374	30.2
	A1		0–130		444,406	66.3
		mean:	127.3	total:	669,648	100
Reading	B2		300–320		2,841	0.4
	B1		220–290		24,752	3.7
	A2		140–210		196,793	29.4
	A1		0–130		445,351	66.5
		mean:	133.3	total:	669,737	100

Note. The values below the dashed lines indicate the attainment targets set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The data presented in the table are based on MEXT statistics (2017b).

maximum score of 14 points.

Part A: The test measures the ability to read English sentences aloud, correctly pronounce words, and understand the coherence of meaning.
Part B: The test evaluates the candidate's ability to respond immediately and appropriately to the questions posed by the examiner based on personal experience and thoughts.
Part C: The test measures the candidate's ability to express an opinion on a given social topic based on personal experience and thoughts.

Below are two examples of conversational exchange questions in the 2019 version of Part B, along with model answers (MEXT, 2017b, p28.).

Question A: "What can you do to stay healthy?"
Model Answer: "I try to walk to school for 30 minutes every day."
Question B: "What did you enjoy the most during the last summer holiday, and why?"
Model Answer: "I went to Okinawa. It was very interesting. The sea and the sky were beautiful."

The grammar and vocabulary necessary to answer the questions are unmistakably basic ones that students have already learned in junior high school. Students are not expected to respond with difficult words or sentence structures. For example, of the main words used in the model answers to Question A, the words "try" (83%), "walk" (100%), "school" (100%), and "minute" (50%) are covered in the six major textbooks for first-year junior high school students. Hence, one can infer that the language material for answering these questions is available to learners.

However, an important issue in speaking instruction is understanding how to guide learners' prior knowledge into speech. From this perspective, the current study conducts an empirical analysis to determine how to elicit speech in learners facing difficulties in English by using strategic competence as a key concept.

This study hypothesized that English learners' speaking ability depends on skills such as vocabulary and grammar and that the knowledge of communicative competence itself grants the opportunity to draw out their existing knowledge of English as speech. Therefore, this study analyzed the effectiveness of classes incorporating training on strategic competence in a "before vs. after" comparison. The specific prediction is that post-training improvements will occur in (1) strategic competence using turn-taking; (2) quantity and quality of speech at the sentence and word levels; and (3) attitude toward communication.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Anxiety About Speaking

Many studies on English teaching have focused on how to encourage learners to speak from the perspectives of teaching methods and learning content. However, learners' hesitancy to speak commonly stems from the sense of "I can't do it" or "I don't want to communicate in English" (Rian, 2016). Such perception can be described as a kind of learning anxiety and suggests that the lack of speaking ability is not simply about proficiency in grammar or vocabulary.

Horwitz et al. (1986) theorized that learning anxiety in the foreign language classroom could be of three types: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and testing anxiety. Cutróne (2009) focused on the first of the three factors, stating that communication apprehension may be defined as fear regarding the real or anticipated act of speaking and that it is this type of anxiety that teachers find most prevalent in oral English as a Foreign Language classes in Japan.

Maleki (2010) argued that second language learners often encounter communication barriers when attempting to use the target language and teaching learners to use effective communication strategies is one way to resolve these barriers. Indeed, this problem is not the only issue faced by learners; when speaking in class, learners with communicative anxieties and difficulties experience an exacerbation of their problems arising from their limited knowledge of English. Emphasizing learning communication strategies is one way to help them overcome their anxiety and encourage them to express themselves. Maleki (2010) further described communication strategies as "an individual's attempt to find a way to fill the gap between their communication effort and immediate available linguistic resources" (p. 640). Since the use of communication strategies is beneficial to anxious language learners, he argued that training in communication strategies should be incorporated into the school syllabus. Hence, he introduced a method of teaching communication strategies that makes it possible to remove fear and anxiety.

2.2 Importance of Strategic Competence

The key concept in this study is "strategic competence," which is a part of communicative competence. It is an important aspect of classroom practice that encourages learners to speak. Since the 1960s, researchers have attempted to define communicative competence, which is the basis of speaking ability. Hymes (1972) introduced the term "communicative competence" with reference to Chomsky's (1965) proposal about the dichotomous nature of language. Based on subsequent theoretical developments, Canale and Swain (1980) established a trichotomy of communicative competence, defining the components of communicative competence as follows (Figure 1):

1. Grammatical competence
   This type of competence includes knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence grammar semantics, and phonology.
2. Sociolinguistic competence

This component comprises two sets of rules: sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse. Knowledge of these rules is crucial in interpreting utterances for social meaning, particularly when the level of transparency between the literal meaning of an utterance and the speaker's intention is low.

3. Strategic competence

This component consists of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for communication breakdowns due to performance variables or insufficient competence. Such strategies are of two main types: those that relate primarily to grammatical competence (e.g., how to paraphrase grammatical forms that one has not mastered or cannot recall momentarily) and those that relate to sociolinguistic competence (e.g., various role-playing strategies, how to address strangers when unsure of their social status).

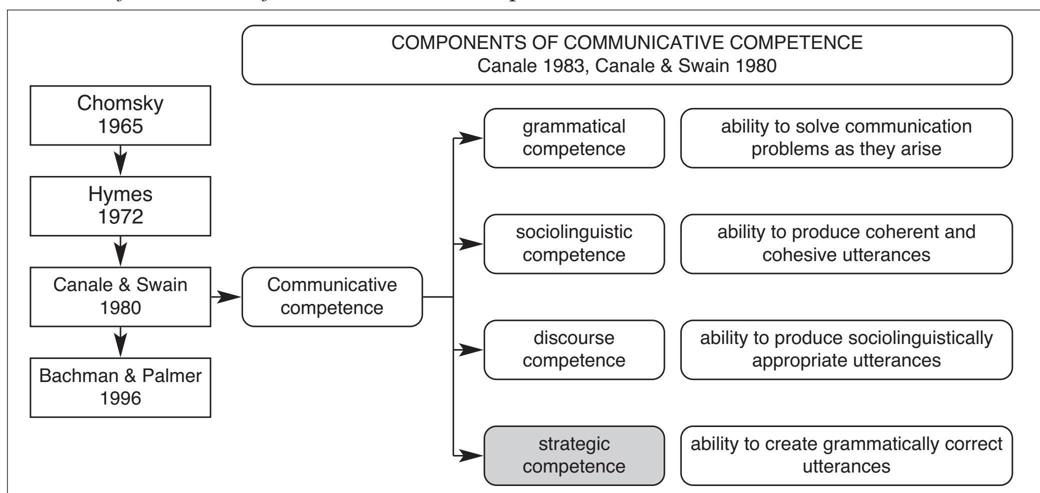
Communicative competence is composed minimally of these three components; any of them being especially crucial to successful communication lacks strong theoretical or empirical support. Canale (1983) added a fourth competence, namely, "discourse competence." Bachman and Palmer (1996) developed a relatively comprehensive model of communicative language ability. Figure 1 summarizes the development of their model from Chomsky (1965) to Bachman and Palmer (1996).

2.3 Significance of Strategic Competence Teaching

Dörnyei and Thurrell (1991) stated that strategic competence includes various linguistic and nonlinguistic means to deal with difficulties and breakdowns that occur in everyday communication. Drawing upon applied linguists' demonstrations of how the development of strategic competence greatly influences learners' conversational ability and fluency, they argued that learners' lack of fluency and conversational ability might be attributed to the underdevelopment

Figure 1

Timeline of the Model of Communicative Competence



of strategic competence. Dörnyei (1995) suggested that strategic competence has not been incorporated into actual language teaching because of conflicting views and controversies about its effectiveness and stressed the need to incorporate strategy training into the syllabus of foreign language learning. Several subsequent studies have shown that strategy acquisition indeed improves learners' English output (Chen, 1990; Maleki, 2010; Tatsukawa, 2007; Seong, 2014); strategic competence teaching is undoubtedly important.

Eliciting speech in the target language from learners, especially those with difficulty with English, is difficult for many foreign language teachers. To solve this problem, various classroom improvements have been attempted, such as devising new methods of teaching vocabulary and grammar and augmenting output tasks; however, few studies with significant results in this regard have been identified. This study is novel in that it shifts the focus from English language learning to the development of communicative competence itself, exploring the possibility of reducing learners' anxiety about speaking and instead drawing out the knowledge they have already acquired in the form of speech.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were 97 first-year non-English majors at a private university in Tokyo. They were asked about the English language qualifications they obtained upon graduating high school; 26.8% reported attaining at least the third grade on the Eiken English Proficiency Test (Table 2). They were also asked to answer a questionnaire asking about their level of motivation for learning English after entering university; 52% of them answered "high" or "very high," while 48% answered "low" or "very low," with the most frequent answer being "high" (37%) (Table 3). This result indicated that the participants needed remedial English education and were motivated to a certain degree, but many had not reached the secondary school graduation level.

During the survey, the participants were informed that the results would be used for research purposes only, be managed in a manner that would not identify any individual, and would not influence their grades in any way.

Table 2

Participants' Attainment on the Eiken English Proficiency Test

Grade	Pre1	2	Pre2	3	Other	Total
N	0	2	10	14	71	97
%	0	2.1	10.3	14.4	73.2	100

Table 3

Participants' Current Level of Motivation for Learning English

Level	Very high	High	Low	Very low	Total
N	14	36	21	26	977
%	14.43	37.11	21.65	26.8	100

3.2 Procedure

The study consisted of three main phases, as described in this subsection. The effects of learning about strategic competence were compared in terms of changes in the amount and content of speech in a "before vs. after" manner. All teacher-student interactions were conducted in a live interactive class using the Zoom platform.

3.2.1 Phase 1: First Conversation ("Before")

First, all participants were instructed to respond to one question from the teacher by speaking in English for 30 seconds in a conversational manner. Only two instructions were given: first, the teacher would start the conversation by asking, "How was your weekend?"; second, the participants would write down what they said after the conversation. Instructions about vocabulary, expressions, or other aspects of English used in the conversation were not provided. Thirty seconds after the conversation, the participants wrote down all their utterances on a record sheet and then typed them into a response box on a Google form. The teacher gave no feedback after the trial.

3.2.2 Phase 2: Training Lecture

To try to improve strategic competence, a short lecture of about 15 min was given to the participants. In this lecture, which was given immediately after the completion of Phase 1, the "AAA technique" was introduced as an example of strategic competence improvement training. The material used was a handout based on the section "Continue conversations" in Unit 1 of the *Reach Out Intermediate Coursebook (Fourth Edition)* (Nakano et al., 2013). The lecture covered the AAA technique's effectiveness as a strategy for avoiding or repairing silence in English conversation and was aimed toward the understanding and practice of turn-taking and the AAA technique, as described below.

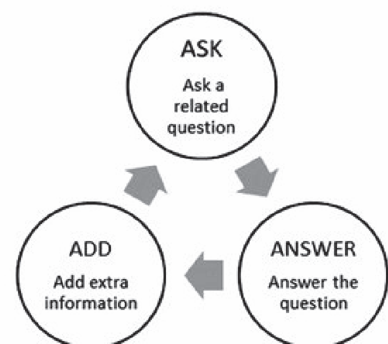
- *Turn-taking*

  "A conversation, like 'passing the baton,' is established when the participants speak in turns. It is called 'turn-taking' in English and 'speaker alternation' in Japanese. Once you have learned how to make this turn-taking work, it becomes easier to continue the conversation."
- *AAA technique*

  "The AAA technique is a communication strategy to keep turn-taking going and sustain or restore the conversation. The three A's stand for Answer, Add, and Ask. Ask plays an important role in facilitating turn-taking and maintaining the cycle of conversation." (Figure 2)

Figure 2

System of the AAA Technique



In the lecture, some examples of conversations in Japanese were used. No new knowledge

of English was taught, such as vocabulary, grammar, or idioms. After confirming verbally that the students fully understood the content of the lecture, we proceeded to the second English conversation.

3.2.3 Phase 3: Second Conversation (“After”)

Immediately after the lecture, the participants were reminded to pay attention to turn-taking, as discussed in the lecture, and to be conscious of returning the baton of the conversation to the teacher by using the AAA technique.

The participants responded to the teacher’s question again, engaging in another conversational English exchange for 30 seconds. The teacher started the conversation by asking, “How was your weekend ?” After responding, each participant again wrote down and then typed their utterances into a Google form.

3.3 Definition of Terms

Using the speech records submitted by the participants, the turn-taking events, number of sentences, and number of content words were checked, and the “before” and “after” changes were analyzed. The following definitions were used:

- *Turn-taking*

  “One participant, A, talks, stops; another, B, starts, talks, stops; and so we obtain an A-B-A-B-A-B distribution of talk across two participants” (Levinson 1983; 296).
- *Sentence*

  “A word, clause, phrase, or a group of clauses or phrases forming a syntactic unit which expresses an assertion, a question, a command, a wish, an exclamation, or the performance of an action” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
- *Content word*

  “A word, typically a noun, verb, adjective, or adverb, that carries semantic content, bearing reference to the world independently of its use within a particular sentence” (Collins English Dictionary, n.d.).

4. Results

4.1 Turn-Taking Analysis

4.1.1 Frequency of Ask

In the AAA technique discussed in the lecture, Ask plays the main role. As shown in Table 4, the participants used Ask as a strategy during their conversations, in which the sequence of speaking was teacher→me→teacher (A-B-A). A total of two out of 97 (2.1% “before”) and 72 (74.3% “after”) participants used Ask to realize turn-taking.

4.1.2 Relationship Between Ask and Add

The analysis of the contents of Ask in the “after” phase revealed the following two types:

Type 1: The speaker asks the addressee to expound on the information added by Add (n = 14).

Example: I played soccer with my friends. Do you like soccer?

Type 2: The speaker immediately moves away from the information added by Add and asks the

addressee to talk about something else (n = 58).

Example: I went to the cinema. What did you do on your weekend?

The difference in the number of content words in Add for Types 1 and 2 was analyzed using the Wilcoxon rank sum test. The medians [interquartile range, IQR] were Type 1: 6 [5–7.3] and Type 2: 5 [4–6], with $p = 0.03$, indicating a statistically significant difference. The relatively large amount of information in Type 1 Add may indicate an intention to deepen and continue the topic. Compared with Type 2, which immediately changes the topic, Type 1 may use more content words to enrich the conversation. Further investigation is needed to verify this hypothesis.

4.2 Sentence and Word Analysis

To compare the differences in the number of "before" vs. "after" sentences and content words, this study tabulated each item on the basis of the definitions described previously. The normality of each item was checked using a histogram, Q-Q plot, and Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. As all data were non-normally distributed, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used.

4.2.1. Sentence Analysis

Table 5 shows the distributions of the number of sentences uttered in the "before" and "after" phases. The median number of sentences uttered showed a threefold increase from the "before" to the "after" phase. In the "before" phase, most participants answered the teacher's question with only one sentence. Of the participants, 34% responded with a simple platitude (e.g., "I was…"). By contrast, significantly more sentences were used in the "after" phase. The

Table 4

Comparison of Before and After Usage of Ask

	Before		After	
Speech Patterns	n	%	n	%
Answer + Add + Ask	2	2.1	60	61.9
Answer + Ask	0	0.0	12	12.4
Add + Ask	0	0.0	0	0.0
Ask	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total utterance, including Ask	2	2.1	72	74.3
Answer	70	72.2	8	8.2
Answer + Add	17	17.5	16	16.5
Add	0	0.0	0	0.0
No utterance/Japanese	8	8.2	1	1.0
Total of utterances without Ask	95	97.9	25	25.7

Table 5

Comparison of Number of Sentences and Content Words in "Before" and "After" Phases

Variables	Before		After		p value
	Median (range)	Mode	Median (range)	Mode	
Sentences	1 (0–3)	1	3 (0–6)	3	<0.0001[a] **
Content words	2 (0–6)	2	5 (0–13)	5	<0.0001[a] **

Note. $N = 97$.[a] Wilcoxon signed-rank test; $^{**}p < 0.001$

most frequently used pattern was A-A-A, with one sentence each. With more sentences, the Add part involved multiple sentences.

Two trends were notable in the increase in the number of sentences used. The first was an increase in the amount of information, as in Examples 1–3 in Table 6. The participants increased the amount of information in the Add section by adding their impressions (Example 1), giving specific examples (Example 2), or stating reasons (Example 3). This addition did not complicate the sentence structure but enriched the conversation by including simple and short sentences.

The second trend was an increase in the number of utterances, indicating successful turn-taking, as shown in Examples 4–6 in Table 6. Particularly notable here was the overcoming of speech anxiety: in the "before" phase, all participants reported situations such as not being able

Table 6

Verbatim Examples of Utterances

	Answer	Add	Ask
Example 1	Add thoughts		
Before	It was so-so		
After	It was so-so	I studied Japanese it was difficult	How about you?
Example 2	Give concrete examples		
Before	I went live.		
After	I went live.	I like Fujii kaze	Do you know Fujii kaze?
Example 3	Give reasons		
Before	It was hard		
After	It was hard	Because I went to shopping	How was your weekend
Example 4	Time limit		
Before			
After	I called my friend.	It was very fun	How was your weekend?
Example 5	Giving up		
Before	Sorry, I don't speak English.		
After	I play the game	I like games; my favorite game is Fate series	end you?
Example 6	Not confident		
Before	I couldn't answer.		
After	book read		what you?
Example 7	Improved		
Before	I enjoyed my weekend...		
After	I enjoyed my weekend.	I went to Machida and enjoyed K-pop idol's online live.	Do you like K-pop idols?
Example 8	Improved		
Before	I went to sushiro with my mother on the weekend.		
After	I went to sushiro with my mother on the weekend.	I ate a lot of salmon, tuna, and shrimp	how about you?
Example 9			
Before	Yea, I play the video games.		
After	Yea, I play the video games.	Game name is Psychobreak2 and Ark	Your weekend?

Note. Original grammar and punctuation have been retained.

to summarize their thoughts in time (agitation/nervousness), not being able to speak English (frustration), or being confused and thus unable to speak (confusion). However, in the “after” phase, they provided information on topics such as what they enjoyed talking about with their friends on the phone (Example 4), their favorite games (Example 5), or the books they were reading (Example 6). In each case, the participants asked questions, which led to turn-taking, albeit in incomplete sentences. We can infer that the AAA technique was used as a support to overcome learning anxiety and elicit speech. Examples 7, 8, and 9 show improved conversations.

4.2.2 Word Analysis

As shown in Table 5, the median number of words per response more than doubled from the “before” phase to the “after” phase, indicating a significant increase. In the “before” phase, 31 respondents (32%) used a median of two words; in the “after” phase, 22% of the respondents used a median of five words. As shown in Table 6, some respondents said, “I don’t speak English” or “I can’t answer.” Some responses were also given in Japanese. In these cases, the number of words was counted as zero.

In the examples of content words increasing from the “before” phase to the “after” phase in Table 6, the diversification of nouns is prominent. In the Add part of the responses, information was provided by mentioning names or place names (Example 7), store names or types (Example 2), or product names (Example 3), thereby leading to turn-taking. The strategy of using short, simple sentences rather than attempting to construct longer and more complex sentences enriches the conversation.

Table 7 shows the number of nouns, verbs, and adjectives used three or more times in the “before” and “after” phases. The five most frequently used nouns remained the same, but overall, a greater number and variety of nouns were used “after.” The four most frequently used verbs were the same in both conditions, but the variety of verbs increased by more than double in the

Table 7

“Before vs. After” Comparisons of Number of Nouns, Verbs, and Adjectives

Noun				Verb				Adjective			
Before	n	After	n	Before	n	After	n	Before	n	After	n
part-time job	21	part-time job	33	go	13	go	28	good	14	good	15
weekend	11	weekend	29	enjoy	9	play	17	tired	5	tired	6
game	7	game	18	play	8	enjoy	9	busy	3	busy	5
friend	5	friend	15	work	5	work	9	fine	3	fun	5
shopping	4	shopping	8	sleep	3	like	7			happy	4
day	4	video	6			buy	5			last	4
video	3	homework	4			sleep	4				
		birthday	4			watch	3				
		Fujii	3			stay	3				
		corona	3			read	3				
		fun	3			want	3				
		book	3								
		day	3								

“after” phase. The three most frequently used adjectives were the same in both conditions, and no significant difference was noted in the number or types of adjectives used in the “before” and “after” phases.

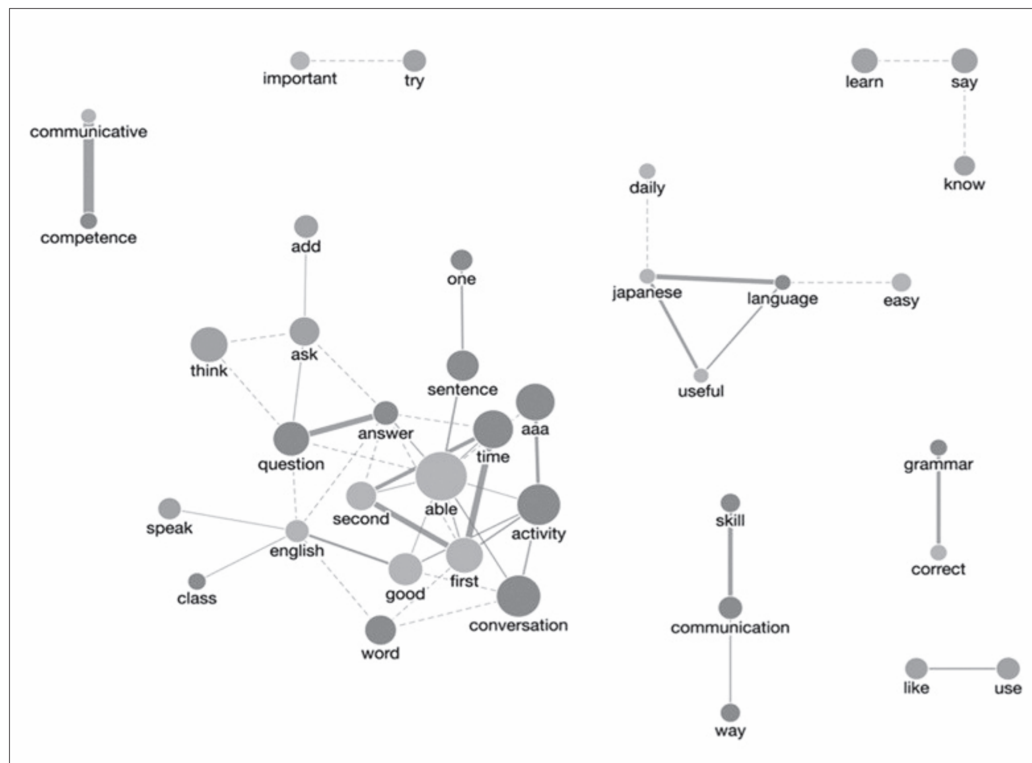
4.2.3 Attitude Toward Communication

Immediately after the completion of Phase 2, the participants were asked to write freely about their impressions of learning the AAA technique. Then, a qualitative analysis was conducted using open-ended questions. Their statements were analyzed using the data mining software User Local AI Text Mining. The most frequently used noun, verb, and adjective were “conversation” (51 times), “answer” (53 times), and “able” (51 times), respectively. The word “able” is a keyword that suggests an awareness of improvement. Below are some examples of how the word “able” was used.

- “I was only able to answer one sentence of the first question. When I was asked the second question again, I was **able** to have a conversation until I asked the other person a question; I think I was **able** to play catch up with the other person.” (Participant 15)
- “When I first answered the questions, I could only answer one brief sentence; but once I became aware of AAA, I could answer each sentence concisely but connectedly. I think I was **able** to successfully put my vocabulary together.” (Participant 27)

Figure 3

Text Mining for Impressions After Learning the AAA Technique



- “By asking for the other person’s response at the end, I was **able** to formulate conversational sentences. I thought that by asking for a response at the end, rather than just talking one-sidedly about myself, I could show that I am willing to talk with them.” (Participant 29)
- “I realized that my vocabulary had not increased but that I now had more recipes for constructing conversational sentences. It may be difficult to increase vocabulary immediately, but once I knew the recipe, I was **able** to quickly assemble and create it even with my current stock of words. I decided to think more about my communication skills.” (Participant 47)
- “At first, I didn’t want to answer more than what was required, so I only answered one sentence; but after being taught AAA, I was **able** to construct sentences so easily that I was surprised. It was interesting to see how the number of sentences that came up changed just because of the rules.” (Participant 67)

Figure 3 shows the co-occurrence network. The word “able” clearly co-occurs frequently and has a strong relationship with words such as “activity,” “answer,” “conversation,” and “question.” Interestingly, several participants commented that the AAA technique could also be applied to native language conversation.

5. Discussion

Dörnyei (1995) commented that effective communication in L2 is possible with 100 words. The results of the current study indicate that an understanding of communicative competence and practical training in communicative strategies may be more valuable for promoting speech production in learners who have already acquired basic vocabulary than simply emphasizing further vocabulary acquisition. When answering questions, the learners in this study used more vocabulary after they received training. This result suggests that focusing on communicative competence facilitates access to some “dormant” words that the learners might otherwise have been unlikely to express.

Of the 97 students included in the survey, only 12.4% had reached the CEFR level 2, which the MEXT defines as the attainment goal for high school graduation. The study showed that learners’ limited and fragmented knowledge of English could be brought out explicitly in conversations through the acquisition of communication strategies. This finding confirms the degree of effectiveness of the training in this study. However, given the limited sample size, we could not verify how this strategy might benefit learners with higher grammatical competence. Hence, a broader survey should be conducted in a future study to determine the characteristics of each level of learners.

6. Conclusion

Recently, speaking skills in English language education in Japan have been emphasized. This trend has led to major changes in the class content, including a significant increase in the number of vocabulary words to be mastered and teachers teaching entirely in English. However, such reforms in English education have neglected to introduce any understanding of communicative competence into the class content or to examine teaching methods related to

communication. As the results of this study show, grammatical competence is a part of communicative competence. To develop communicative competence in English, learners should recognize the existence of other important elements. Teachers should also recognize the same and build a systematic framework to teach these elements.

Further research is warranted for a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying the present findings and for addressing aspects such as the limits of strategies of communicative competence in terms of context and duration. Researchers involved in English education will appreciate further studies on communicative competence development in the context of the overall school education system.

References

Bachman, L. F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996) *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

Canale, M. (1983) From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards, & R. W. Schmidt (Eds), *Language and Communication* (pp. 2–27). London: Longman.

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics, 1*(1), 1–47.

Chan, S. (1990). A study of communication strategies in interlanguage production by Chinese EFL learners. *Language Learning, 40*(2), 155–187.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Collins English Dictionary. (n.d.). Content word. In *Collins Dictionary*. Retrieved December 27, 2022, from https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/content-word

Cutróne, P. (2009). Overcoming Japanese EFL learners' fear of speaking. *University of Reading, Language Studies Working Papers, 1*, 55–63.

Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1991). Strategic competence and how to teach it. *ELT Journal, 45*, 16–23.

Dörnyei, Z. (1995). On the teachability of communication strategies. *TESOL Quarterly, 29*(1), 55–85.

Education Bureau of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. (2022). Junior High School Speaking Test. https://www.tokyo-portal-edu.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/speaking-test.htm

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125–132.

Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics: selected readings* (pp. 269–293). Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Sentence. In *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*. Retrieved December 18, 2022, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentence

Maleki, A. (2010). Techniques to teach communication strategies. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 1*(5), 640–646.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2002). Eigoga tsukaeru nihonjin no ikuseino tameno senryakukousou. [Developing a strategic plan to cultivate Japanese with English abilities].
https://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chousa/shotou/020/sesaku/020702.htm #plan

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2017a). Eigokyouiku kaizen no tameno eigoryoku chousa jigyou houkokusho kekka gaiyou. [Report on a project to reform English education].
https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2018/04/06/1403470_01_1.pdf

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2017b). Eigoryoku chousakekka (koukou 3nennsei) gaiyou. [Summary of English proficiency survey results: senior high school students]
https://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/kokusai/gaikokugo/__icsFiles/afieldfile/2018/04/06/1403470_03

_1.pdf
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). (2018). Dai3ki kyouiku shinkou kihon keikaku. [The third basic plan for the promotion of education]. https://www.mext.go.jp/content/1406127_002.pdf
Nakano, M., Ayabe, M., & Balderi, M. (2013). *Reach out intermediate coursebook* (4th ed.). Waseda University International.
Rian, J. P. (2016). Teachable communication strategies: Asking for help in English conversations. On *CUE Journal, 9*(3), 287–309. https://jaltcue.org/files/OnCUE/OCJ9.3/OCJ9.3_pp287-309_Rian.pdf
Seong, Y. (2014). Strategic competence and L2 speaking assessment. *Teachers College, Columbia. University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics, 14*(1), 13–24.
Tatsukawa, K. (2007). Developing an assessment tool for the strategic competence of Japanese EFL learners. *Journal of Asia TEFL, 4*(3), 71–92.