

Design English collaboration and presentation: Developing international designers at a Japanese university

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Abstract: *This study reports on a long-term project to improve the English presentation skills of students in the Faculty of Design at a Japanese university. The first two years of a collaborative effort to pair Industrial Design majors with advanced students in the Department of International Culture to collaborate on a product or product concept and present their work in English will be described. Recent measures to improve English education in Japan include the introduction of English study in elementary school, and adopting communicative-based learning in high schools. At the university level, content-based English education, or English for Specific Purposes (ESP), has been implemented in some curricula to provide students with language ability and competence that will serve them in careers where English is a required skill set. A number of disciplines have attempted to use content-based teaching; unfortunately, little has successfully been done in design faculties at Japanese universities to prepare graduates to become international designers. This project recognizes that it is essential for design students to get specialized training in not only communicative English, but also the specialized vocabulary and presentation skills that will be required of them in careers in the design field.*

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Global design and English competence

Much has been written about the importance of English skills for success in the global marketplace. Hejazi and Ma state, "Given that the largest economy in the world, the USA, and three of the G7 countries have English as an official language, then it would perhaps not be surprising that English-speaking countries may account for the largest share of economic activities relative to other languages" (Hejazi and Ma 2011, 154).

In the Design field, as well as a number of other industries and disciplines, English skills are imperative not only for individual success, but also for companies to compete and thrive. While industry is all too aware of these needs, there seems to be a disconnect at the educational level. In some countries where English is taught as a foreign language, English study focuses on the grammar translation method and exam preparation. As a result, practical, communicative English skills that may serve students in the global workplace are given short shrift. Not only does this approach to language study deprive students of important learning opportunities, but it can also have a negative impact on certain industries whose pool of talented workers is made smaller due to poor language skills. The design field is no exception to this phenomenon. In fact, it is unfortunate that a number of talented design students graduate from university lacking the English language skills to contribute to the international design field. In Japan, this is certainly the case. A change in the way English is approached needs to take place for Japanese English speakers to be successful in business. The emphasis on perfection, or exam-level English needs to be shifted toward a more practical use of language. Brian J. Hurn calls for the development of "a form of international English. . . [that] should consist of words and phrases which are in little danger of being misunderstood" (303). After examining some of the factors that contribute to poor vocational English preparation in Japan, and the impact that this has on students and their careers, a program designed to remedy this problem will be described.

English Study in Japan

Sakai and Kikuchi (2009), in a study on demotivating factors contributing to poor English learning experiences among Japanese university students, have described the following factors as being significant: "lack of a sense of control over what one is learning, . . . a sense of classes being overly exam-oriented, feelings of inferiority about one's English ability, and peers' negative attitude toward English learning" (59). The project described in this paper attempts to address all of the above factors with particular emphasis on the first two. The authors of that study go on to further show that, "the learner-level problem influenced demotivation the most, followed by the language level problem, and finally the learning situation level problem" (Sakai and Kikuchi 2009, 60). The university at which this project is being implemented has two faculties and six departments. Generally speaking, students in the design departments (Industrial Design, Art and Science, Space and Architecture) score lower on standardized English tests, and as a result get classified as lower-level students. Unfortunately, this method of classification does not take into consideration different learning styles and student needs. It also grossly underestimates the potential of a dynamic and creative segment of the student population. As Sakai and Kikuchi have noted, classifying students into lower levels has an adverse effect on motivation (60).

Practitioners in second language acquisition can attest to the importance that motivation plays in successful learning.

Motivation and language learning

A big obstacle to English language learning at the university level in Japan is motivation. Language learning motivation is a notoriously complex construct affected by many factors. One factor negatively impacting motivation in Japan is that students often find themselves with few opportunities to hear or speak English. Students with no intention of leaving Japan also frequently feel that good English skills are irrelevant to their future careers. In trying to motivate Japanese university students, in this particular case design majors, it helps to explore ways to change their perspectives. Ema Ushioda, in Dornyei (2001), has studied, “the evolving nature of goal orientation in learners’ motivational experience” (111). Furthermore, Ushioda notes the influence of “clarity or priority of particular goals or future perspectives” (111) in motivational change. Ushioda goes on to cite an individual learner who “spoke about the instrumental value of her [language] skills following some work experience . . . and talked about some career perspectives that seemed to be shaping her motivation more” (111). It is critical for design students to undergo such a motivational shift in their language studies. Much has been written in second language literature about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and its impact on language learning. In the case of Japanese university design majors, another component requires consideration. Vocabulary and communication skills required to create and describe products or concepts in English is necessary for success with design English. It is hoped that the collaboration project described in this report will instill in Design students who expect to become design professionals the belief that English is a skill that will be useful in their future careers.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Belcher (2004) defines ESP as the “attempt to give learners access to the language they want and need to accomplish their own academic or occupational goals” (166). The collaboration project described in this paper attempts to do exactly that; it provides design students with the language they will need to reach professional goals. As a cautionary note, Belcher goes on to cite Spack (1988) when noting that “a common complaint is that many ESP instructors could not (or would not) engage in the type of specialized language use that they attempt to induct learners into, e.g., humanities majors teaching the language of science and technology” (165-6). Having design professors with extensive professional experience prior to taking university teaching positions on this project team renders the above complaint moot. The long-term nature of this project will allow both design and English instructors to respond to the subtly different specialized language needs of design students based on their product concept and the message they wish to convey in their presentation. Kassim and Ali (2009) studied the use of English for specific purposes in Malaysia, a country similar to Japan in that English is not the native language of the overwhelming majority of the population. Specifically, they investigated required use of English in the workplace and found that “informal work-related meetings and discussions, giving oral presentations” and “the presentation of new ideas and alternative strategies” (177) were all seen as very frequent or frequent situations in which English was required. The weekly lessons of

the collaboration project have been designed to specifically provide for learning experiences that allow students to practice all of the above uses of English.

Design collaboration

To remedy the aforementioned problems, a long-term project has been undertaken at a Japanese university to improve English education for students studying design. Many members of the Design faculty at the university come to academia from the private sector. Oftentimes they recognize the incompatibility between Design students' English proficiency and attitudes towards English and the English language skills that employers will be expecting of them if they embark on careers as professional designers. In an effort to correct this situation, a course was created in which Industrial Design majors were paired with advanced English students studying in a two-year English Diploma Course in the Department of International Culture. The over-arching goal of the collaboration project was to give Design students a chance to improve their communicative English while also giving them experience both presenting and using specialized vocabulary in English. The project consisted of two different courses, a Design seminar taught by an instructor from the Department of Industrial Design and an upper-level presentation course, separated into two sections, taught by two English instructors from the Department of International Culture. The courses followed different tracks for the first eight weeks of the semester before coming together in the ninth week for the final six weeks of the fifteen-week semester. Classes were ninety minutes each and met once a week. The first half of the Design seminar was devoted to having students develop a product, create a prototype and prepare a presentation in Japanese. During the first half of the Department of International Culture course students prepared and delivered a presentation in English to their teacher and classmates. The different tracks followed by the two courses in the first half of the semester ensured that all parties would be fully prepared and able to be productive once the collaboration began in earnest. The project was designed to give Industrial Design students practical experience using English to shepherd a product design through all the stages of a process leading to a final presentation. While the development of English presentation skills has been the primary focus of this project, a number of other important language skills can also be fostered as a result of this collaboration. Chou states, "cooperative learning emphasizes the importance of group dynamics, the creation of a motivating environment, group formation, and the benefits of group learning" (280). No doubt, individuals benefit by gaining valuable presentation experience, but they also gain a lot from working in groups. It is hoped that peers coming to this project from different backgrounds and with markedly different academic and professional goals can create a symbiotic working relationship.

Group Dynamics

Dornyei and Malderez (1997) state that, "Groups can be a substantial source of motivation to learn the L2. It has been recognized increasingly recently that group-based motives form a great proportion of the complex of L2 motivation" (67). Concerning success in the L2 classroom, the authors stress the importance of "what goes on inside and between people in the classroom" (Dornyei and Malderez 1997, 67). Creating teams of students from different fields of study added diversity to the groups and also allowed students to have a multidisciplinary learning experience that may most closely resemble a "real world" work environment. Students not only gained

language experience by learning how to use transactional language and discussion techniques, but they also were able to learn how to compromise, see things from a variety of perspectives, take a position on an issue and politely defend their ideas. The final item on this list, practice in defending a position, would serve students well when they gave their presentations at the end of the semester. Indeed, by making the final presentations open to the university community the project coordinators were virtually ensuring that students would be faced with penetrating questions and sometimes critical comments from design professors or professors in other disciplines.

Presentation and Q & A

Querol-Julian and Fortanet-Gomez (2012) describe the challenges encountered by non-native English presenters who find themselves standing in front of an audience (in some cases with many native English speakers), eager to find out more about the topic that was just presented. Just as presenters breathe a sigh of relief after delivering their presentation, they are faced with a new challenge. No matter how hard a presenter prepares, the Q & A will always be an unknown variable. Querol-Julian and Fortanet-Gomez state that, "During the presentation, the roles of presenter or speaker and audience or hearer are static, but they are dynamic, changing with every new contribution in the discussion session from the presenter as speaker and the discussant as audience, to the discussant as speaker and the presenter as addressee and audience" (272). As mentioned above in the section on English Study in Japan, feelings of inferiority can have a negative impact on the learning experience. Bearing this in mind, the instructors took measures to encourage students and build confidence. Students involved in this project were provided with an environment that allowed them to take risks without fear of failure. Furthermore, students were given a chance to rehearse their presentation in front of their classmates and supportive instructors before appearing on the big stage. In some instances, students were given support with mock question and answer sessions; however, more can be done to prepare a presenter to "defend the validity of his or her research [product] in the face of possible criticism by discussants" (Querol-Julian and Fortanet-Gomez 2012, 272). The experience of having to explain and defend a position and diplomatically handle criticism and differences of opinion is meant to model to some extent an actual workplace environment. Rehearsals and mock question and answer sessions, while undoubtedly useful, cannot be expected to prepare presenters for every possible eventuality they may face and primary responsibility will fall on the presenter to be able to adequately explain and defend his or her product. In any case, preparation has been, and will continue to be, supported through the collaborative efforts of teachers and students. The three stages of the collaboration will be described below, followed by examples of student work (Figures 4 and 5) and results of a brief survey (Table 1) conducted in the first year of the project.

Collaboration Stage 1

This project was first conceived in 2010 after observing Japanese Design majors in their university English courses over a number of years. After meetings and planning sessions between a Design professor and an English professor, a team was formed. The project officially started in April 2011. The number of students in the Industrial Design course (n=9) and the Department of International Culture (n=22) course differed; this difference in balance required some design students to work with a pair of International Culture majors while other design students were assigned to work with a group of three students studying International Culture. Before describing the schedule for the project, some background will be given on the Japanese university academic calendar and how the design curriculum and English courses were managed.

The academic year in Japan runs from April to March. As mentioned above, each semester consists of fifteen weeks plus a week for final exams. Classes meet ninety minutes each week. Each course provides twenty-two and one half contact hours each semester; therefore, teachers are remiss to give up valuable time from their syllabi. This is the case particularly in higher-level courses that require students to develop specialized knowledge and skills. Both English teachers and design teachers are well aware of this situation and strove to ensure that both design and English education were given adequate coverage. Design classes met on Tuesdays during second period (10:40am to 12:10pm) and then from the ninth week of the semester design students also started meeting with their counterparts in the other faculty on Tuesdays during third period (13:00pm to 14:30pm), while they continued their design studies in second period. Two reasons were responsible for this arrangement: 1. both courses could not be scheduled at the same time in the current curriculum; 2. sacrificing valuable time from design courses would have been detrimental to the design students' education. From an administrative and educational perspective, it was a lot easier and more practical to open the International Culture English Diploma Course to the Design majors (to provide additional class time), than it would have been to take time away from the Industrial Design seminars. In brief, additional class time, in the form of English collaboration, was added to the design students' schedules, while students continued to receive design education. The methods of course management when both faculties came together will be described below.

The first week of the collaboration (week nine of the Spring semester) was devoted to having Industrial Design students make an initial presentation of their product in Japanese. International Culture majors were responsible for completing a questionnaire evaluating each presentation and product and noting preferences as to which product they found most interesting and which designer they would most like to work with. Based partially on this information, Industrial Design students were matched up with their counterparts in the Department of International Culture to form teams of three or four (with one design student per team) for the rest of the semester. The following two weeks of class time were devoted to having teams work together to clarify and refine the product concept. Weeks four and five of the collaboration (weeks twelve and thirteen of the semester) focused on ensuring that product concepts were rendered into clear and natural English and that the presentation was polished and well-organized. On the penultimate week of the collaboration project each team was given a chance to do a practice English presentation in front of their teachers and peers and to receive feedback and advice. The final week was devoted to the final presentation by each team. This final presentation was publicized and open to the university

community at large. As discussed above, it was hoped that design professors and other attendees would ask probing questions which would force each team to be able to clearly and succinctly articulate their product concept and its value to their audience.

Observations of student participation in this project, as well as comments provided by students, both Design and International Culture, show that the experience was worthwhile and encouraged the instructors to continue the project. Table 1 shows the results of a survey of students from both departments taken after completion of the project in July 2011. Students responded to a number of statements regarding motivation to study English, confidence to use English, and a willingness to take part in a similar project in the future. Students responded on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive response. Data and commentary that are relevant to this report will be provided below.

Responders from both departments stated favorably that the program prompted them to study English (4.6/5 Design; 4.5/5 International Culture). Furthermore, both groups would like to be English speakers (4.4/5 Design; 4.8/5 International Culture). Both sets of responses are encouraging to the organizers of this program and demonstrate that some of the initial goals (awareness raising and increasing motivation) of the program have been accomplished. In determining whether or not to continue the program, and what benefits were received, responses were also positive. In response to the question: "Has this program been beneficial to you?" both groups, recipients of different types of benefits, saw merit in the program (4.7/5 Design; 4.6/5 International Culture). Students from both majors also would be interested in joining a program like this again (4.1/5 Design; 4.1/5 International Culture). One question on the survey that received the lowest scores was: "Do you feel hesitation in speaking English?". Both groups responded similarly, even the advanced students (Design 3.6/5; International Culture 3.7/5). This response confirmed the assumptions of the organizers of the program that students need many opportunities to use practical English to build confidence. Furthermore, the process and support system conceived of for this project was intended to build student confidence. In the next stage of the project, further steps were introduced to give students more practice and support, so they would be less hesitant to speak English.



Figure 1. collaboration in English workshops and discussions

Collaboration Stage 2

Having achieved success in 2011, the project was continued and expanded for the 2012 academic year; a number of new components were added. In particular, two more design professors and an additional professor from the Department of International Culture joined the team. The additional team members would be instrumental in bringing fresh ideas and different perspectives to the project. The success of the project in its initial year and the addition of the design professors, which necessitated opening up another section of the design seminar, resulted in a more than doubling of the number of students from the Department of Industrial Design joining the project. The new teaching team members would be instrumental in ensuring adequate support for the greater number of students who had joined the program. The number of advanced English students stayed roughly the same in 2012, so that there was now a one-to-one ratio of Design student ($n=23$) and advanced English student ($n=23$). The semester schedule was set in a similar fashion as the previous year; however, the increase in the number of students, plus the loss of one work day due to a school closing because of bad weather, would mean the process would have to be sped up to make the presentation deadlines. To accomplish this, students were required to do more work independently outside of regularly scheduled class time while working one-on-one with a partner rather than in a group of three or four. Despite the added burden, the teams took on these tasks with enthusiasm and were able to successfully complete their work on time. A second scheduling challenge was caused by a special addition to the 2012 program: the attendance at the final presentation of guest designers from an international company near the university. The designers, young, dynamic professionals from France and Denmark respectively, attended the final presentations as audience members and subsequently participated in a panel discussion to provide advice to the presentation teams. This experience proved to be extremely valuable to the students who were able to meet potential models for their future selves, international designers close in age to themselves working in an English language environment. The presence of the guest designers also proved to be very useful for the instructors on the team as it provided them a benchmark for their students to aspire toward. Hearing the voices of international designers in this context provided a corpus of design language that will be used in future courses and also in the creation of a special design English textbook that will continue development in the third stage of this project in late 2012 and early 2013.



Figure 2. English presentation

Collaboration Stage 3

The third stage of this project has begun and includes another component to improve the English language skills in general, and the discussion and presentation skills in particular, of design majors at university. A long-term goal of the project is to write a design English textbook that can be used not only by students, but also other professionals in the design field who need assistance with English and presentation skills. Language professionals and design professionals will develop the text, so it will be sound in both language teaching methodology as well as content. The collaboration between the two faculties will also continue. Team members will have to find ways to deal with the increasing number of design students interested in the program. However, that is a welcome challenge because it serves as evidence of the success of the project. It reflects the fact that design majors in at least one Japanese university recognize the need to improve their English and their desire to use it in their careers.

Examples of student work

Examples of student work have been provided below to illustrate the progress students have made in their English skills as a result of this project. The text was edited by a number of collaborators (both Design and International Culture students), and various instructors overseeing the work provided feedback. To make collaboration and editing easier, students shared their materials in google documents and all parties had easy access to the data. Figure 3 shows some examples of edited text. In particular, students were given support to overcome first language interference that may be caused by direct, word-by-word, translation. To arrive at a final text, a number of factors were taken into consideration. Students were taught not to slavishly adhere to mirror translations of the Japanese text. In cases when this was observed, instruction was given in more natural English. Furthermore, students were taught the differences between written and spoken text. The communication of ideas was given precedence over any long, complex technical texts. Students were instructed to consider their audience and the goals of their presentation.

The theme of the design seminar addressed global food issues. Figures 4 and 5 are examples of two products students designed to help people from impoverished nations and people with obesity problems. The D-box (development box) is intended to support children in their education by recycling large cardboard boxes (often left over from aid and supply deliveries) into products to carry school goods, food, and for use as portable desks. The other product shown below was designed as a companion for people who eat alone. The purpose of the product is to monitor eating speed, offer companionship, and to encourage people to eat more slowly, which is a well-known method for controlling weight gain. The two product examples shown below deserve to have a much broader audience than Japan and Japanese speakers; they provide more affirmation of the importance of this collaboration. This project is one of the first steps in a long process of English language education reform being initiated at the university at which it took place. More English remediation for design majors before they enter this program will certainly produce better results. Nonetheless, the examples provided below can be considered good models that can be used by students who enter this program in the future.

Conclusion

While the catalyst for this design English presentation project was concern over the English language and presentation skills of design majors at a Japanese university, this project has evolved over the two years since its inception to encompass a larger scope. The authors of this study believe that this project can be used as a model by other design departments at other universities (in Japan and abroad) to prepare their graduates to make a greater contribution to international design. The steps taken to teach design presentation can be duplicated in other curricula, and in other fields. The stages of the project involved first training and teaching students specialized skills in their respective areas of study; in this case, Industrial Design and advanced English and International Culture. It then brought the diverse groups together to form teams; the teams each had a product or product concept and goals to refine it and present the results in English. Through discussions and workshops, students were able to create a presentation that they delivered first at a rehearsal and subsequently in front of a large audience composed of design professionals, instructors, and lay people. Students were able to learn discussion skills and also public speaking techniques, all in a context that is relevant to their area of study and their futures plans. Lessons learned and progress made by the authors of this study will be used to develop a textbook specifically geared toward English design collaboration and presentation further providing members of the design education community access to the ideas and materials related to this project.


<p>The theme of this class is 'enjoy 5 senses'.</p> <p>Considering the theme of the class, my theme is 'cool'.</p>  <p>We were asked to design about enjoyment of the 5 senses. I decided to design 'cool'.</p>	<p>Before</p> <p>Students were given support in expressing themselves in simple, natural English rather than mirror translations of their original Japanese texts.</p> <p>After</p>
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Figure 3. Language support and editing


<p>Global food issues</p> <p>If you eat your food quickly...</p> <p>You will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> not feel full and will eat too much → Obesity increase blood sugar level and burden the pancreas → Diabetes <p>You should take 20-30 minutes to have a meal</p>	<p>D-box</p> <p>Product to support nutrition and education for children suffering from poverty</p>  <p>Development box = D-box</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of the box 2. Develop the children
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Figure 4. Student slides shows

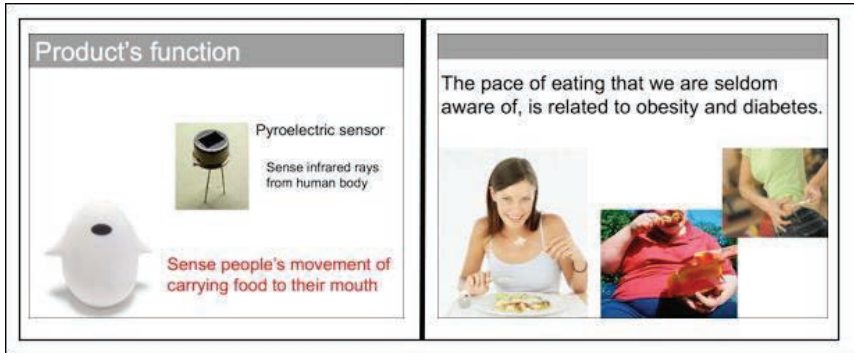


Figure 5. Student slides shows

Table 1. Post-program Design and International Culture student responses to a survey conducted in July 2011.

Scale: 1=Totally No; 2=No; 3=not sure; 4=Yes; 5=Totally Yes Design n=9; English Diploma Students n=13	Design Majors	International Culture Majors
Did this program prompt you to study English?	4.6	4.5
Do you feel less hesitation in speaking English?	3.6	3.7
Do you think you want to be an English speaker?	4.4	4.8
Do you have a greater concern for global issues since starting this project?	4.3	4.3
Has this program been beneficial to you?	4.7	4.6
Would you like to join a program like this again?	4.1	4.1

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