

Inside the Classroom: Interaction in Elementary School English Lessons in Japan

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After some 20 years of debate about the introduction of English education at the elementary school level in Japan, foreign language education (in reality, English in most cases) was formally introduced to the elementary school curriculum in Japan in April of this year as one possible element of "education for international understanding" in the new Integrated Studies class period (*Sogotekina gakushu no jikan*). This paper is an investigation of the kinds of instruction that are now actually being used in elementary school English classrooms. Observations, including videotapes, audiotapes and onsite field notes, were made in 11 English classrooms in public and private schools taught by teachers with different native languages, professional backgrounds and teaching positions. English interaction in these lessons was analyzed using the theoretical framework described by Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998), which makes a three-fold distinction among "focus on forms, focus on meaning, and focus on form".

The analysis revealed that the majority of the instruction was "formS-based". Due to the limited hours of lessons per week, students' knowledge of these forms did not appear to accumulate as the grade level increased. The study points to the difficulty of teaching at the higher grade levels due to the current teaching conditions (limited teaching hours and lack of concrete instructional goals, etc.), and due to the inevitable gap emerging between the students' increasing level of intellect and the level of English activities dictated by their low linguistic ability. "Meaning-based" instruction and "focus on form" instruction, in which students use English as the means of communication at least at the receptive level, were observed in a few classrooms. The instructional content was appropriate for the students' intellectual level, but this type of instruction requires greater English ability and pedagogical skills on the part of the teacher.

Details of observations in each type of classroom are provided. Other problems of the current system are also discussed. It is concluded that improvement in the amount of teaching time and the pedagogy employed, as well as substantial teacher training, is urgently needed.

教室の中では：日本の小学校英語授業における教授法

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日本の小学校英語教育導入の是非は20年あまり議論され、今年の4月から「総合的な学習の時間」における国際理解教育の一要素として外国語（多くの場合英語）を教えてもよいことになった。本稿は、小学校の英語授業における教授法の分析である。公立・私立の計11の小学校で、英語能力や教員歴が異なる様々な教師による英語授業を、観察、録画（或いはオーディオテープに録音）し、フィールドノートをとった。これらの授業で観察した英語のインタラクションを、形式と意味の扱いに基づいた外国語教授法の理論的枠組み (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Long and Robinson, 1998) を用いて分析した。それは、外国語教授法には、(1) 形式ベース (focus on forms), (2) 意味ベース (focus on meaning), (3) フォーカス・オン・フォーム (focus on form) の3つの方法があるというものである。

分析の結果、授業は「形式ベース」で行われているものが主流であることが明らかになった。現在の状況（授業時間が少ないこと、具体的な教授目標の欠如など）では、生徒の知的能力が高度に成長するのに対して英語力は低くとどまるため、高学年の指導が大変困難になりがちである。一方、「意味ベース」と「フォーカス・オン・フォーム」の授業は、少ないが見ることができた。この授業では、生徒は英語を少なくとも受容レベルでコミュニケーションの手段として使っていた。英語の教授内容は生徒の知的レベルに合致しているが、この方法をとるためには、教師の優れた言語運用能力と教授方法の技術が必要である。本稿はそれぞれの授業のタイプについてさらに詳細を述べ、現在の小学校英語教育が持つ他の問題にも触れる。今後、本格的な教師教育に加え、教授時間数と教授法の改善が必要であるとする。

INTRODUCTION¹

Whether or not English should be taught at the elementary school level was discussed for 20 years in Japan before the Committee (*Eigo shido hohoto kaizen no suishin ni kansuru kondankai* [Committee for the Improvement of English Pedagogy and Other Matters]) commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MOE hereafter) finally came to a conclusion, resulting in the

current Course of Study (Kuno, 2001). One reason for the opposition to starting English instruction as a full-fledged subject in elementary schools is the belief that hasty introduction of English teaching into all elementary schools without proper preparation will do more harm than good. Other reasons for opposition to English instruction include possible harm to children's Japanese ability and growth in other areas, fear of English taking over Japanese intra-nationally in the future², and the lack of elementary school teachers who know English well enough to teach it with confidence (For general overviews of the debate, see Kuno, 2001; Matsukawa, 2000; *Soki eigo kyoiku kenkyukai* [Association for Early English Education Research], 1998). Therefore, despite a call for an increase in the number of functional Japanese-English bilinguals and major changes in school English education (Funabashi, 2000), what was actually introduced to the nation's elementary schools from the 2002 school year was foreign language instruction for the purpose of "intercultural understanding" within the newly established "Integrated Studies" period (*Sogotekina gakushu no jikan*).

The Integrated Studies period is part of the new Course of Study introduced in public elementary school Grades 3 through 6 starting from the 2002 school year. The new curriculum includes 105 45-minute Integrated Studies lessons per year for Grades 3 and 4 and 110 for Grades 5 and 6. The Integrated Studies period is designed for "educational activities that employ creative practices to provide interdisciplinary, broad educational experiences that fit the interests of the students" (MOE, *Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities*, Foreword).

MOE guidelines state that "intercultural understanding" is one of the educational activities to be pursued during the Integrated Studies period, and when teaching "intercultural understanding", foreign language conversation (for example, English conversation) can be incorporated in the lesson. In such lessons, however, Mitarai Yasushi, Director-General of the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau of MOE, says that, "It is important to employ experiential learning activities appropriate for elementary school level students which expose students to foreign language and let them become familiar with the lifestyles and cultures of foreign countries" (MOE, 2001b, Foreword).

The *Handbook* goes on to explain the aims and ideal forms of English activities (which are meant to represent ways to introduce any foreign language). These are "to foster interest and desire—not to teach a language" (p. 123). In addition, "emphasis should be based on English terms that students encounter in their daily lives" (p. 124). Furthermore, even though in real life, communication takes place not only through spoken but also via written means, "elementary school 'English activities' [are to] focus on the hearing and speaking of simple English" (p. 124), since teaching written English at this stage is thought to place too big a burden on the students and may result in their developing a dislike of English. Finally "(t)he content to be included in English activities is not fixed" (p. 124), rather the MOE left it for the teacher in charge of the class to devise.

Many ideas have been publicly expressed regarding the introduction of English and how to deal with it in the school curriculum (*Ibunka kyoiku gakkai*, [Intercultural Education Society], 2000; Goto and Tomita, 2001; Kuno, 1999; Matsukawa, 2000; Otsu and Torigai, 2001; Tsukamoto, 2000). In addition, MOE (2001b) compiled the aforementioned handbook for teachers (*Practical Handbook for Elementary*

School English Activities) with a description of principles and a few concrete lesson plans.

Schools were also able to learn from the experience of the 65 elementary schools that had been assigned to serve as experimental schools since 1992 (*Asahi Shimbun*, April 2, 2001, p. 11). These schools were asked to try teaching English as part of Integrated Studies with help from educational and English teaching specialists and share their techniques and findings widely before the national start of such lessons in 2002. In addition to these experimental schools and many private schools which had been teaching English for many years, a large number of public schools³ had already started to incorporate English in their curriculum without waiting for the formal introduction of the new Course of Study. Thus, reports of these various experiences and recommended teaching plans and materials (e.g., Wada, 1999; Watanabe, 1999; *Yamatoshi kyoiku kenkyusho*, 2002) had already started to be published and distributed before the beginning of the 2002 school year.

Elementary schools therefore had a number of options to choose from in planning how they would incorporate English into their Course of Study. In addition to various methods of weaving English instruction into the Integrated Studies period, another possibility was left open. Introducing English as a separate subject had also been discussed by the Committee (*Eigo shido hohoto kaizen no suishin ni kansuru kondankai*, [Committee for the Improvement of English Pedagogy and Other Matters], and this was publicly reported (MOE, 2001a, p. 20). This means that two different goals—namely, developing "intercultural understanding" and developing "English language skills"—were debated one right after the other. Because freedom of choice is guaranteed for schools, at least at this point, some schools have actually introduced English as a subject instead of incorporating it into Integrated Studies lessons. Thus, the way in which English is introduced to the curriculum varies greatly from school to school.

To further complicate matters, the distinction between these two goals is not necessarily evident in actual classroom practice. Even though they may sound entirely distinct, when one goes into actual classrooms professing one or the other of these goals and observes lessons, one may well find it difficult to recall which goal was set for the lesson being conducted. This confusion seems to have resulted partly from a lack of a clearer and narrower definition of what "intercultural understanding" is, and partly from a lack of pedagogical skills on the part of the teachers.

Thus, despite the large number of publications related to elementary school English education on the market, details on this new educational endeavor are not yet grasped by all who need to be involved. We do not know how English is being taught (to say nothing of how it can best be taught) under the present conditions. Nor do we know how much English is being acquired by elementary school children, or how much of the "intercultural understanding" stressed by MOE is being nurtured.

The present study is a preliminary investigation into just one of many unknown issues, that is, current pedagogy. It addresses the following research question:

How is English currently being taught in elementary school classrooms in Japan?

In particular, how much English is exchanged and what type of interaction in English is observable in elementary school English classrooms?

As mentioned above, the schools' own labels declaring the purpose of their lessons to be the development of "intercultural understanding" or "English ability" do not necessarily facilitate the analysis. It was therefore decided that classrooms would be observed without any preconceptions based on these labels, but instead, would be analyzed on the basis of the present researcher's field notes, the instructors' comments, and quantitative data computed using the linguistic framework described in a volume edited by Doughty and Williams (1998). This paper therefore first summarizes the theoretical framework used and then describes the study's methodology before observations of a total of 11 classrooms are reported and discussed. The paper concludes with comments on the limitations of the current system and suggestions for the future.

FOCUS ON FORMS, FOCUS ON MEANING, AND FOCUS ON FORM

In order to classify the types of interaction exchanged in the classrooms, a theoretical framework described by Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998), namely, the three-fold distinction between "focus on forms, focus on meaning, and focus on form"⁴, was used. As most foreign language teachers in this country know, the most popular approach to English language instruction in Japanese secondary schools and higher education so far has been what Wilkins (1976) calls the "synthetic" approach, which means that the "L2 is broken down into words and collocations, grammar rules, phonemes, intonation and stress patterns, structures, notions, or functions", and then learners are exposed to them "in linear and additive fashion" (Long and Robinson, 1998, p. 15) with the expectation that the learners will synthesize them in actual communication scenes. This is what Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998) call the "focus on forms" approach. Long and Robinson (1998) include all of the following methods in "the focus on forms" approach: "Grammar Translation, Audiolingual Method, Audiovisual Method, Silent Way, Noisy Method and Total Physical Response" (Long and Robinson, 1998, p. 16). They also enumerate classroom activities used within this approach: "repetition of models, transformation exercises, display questions, explicit negative feedback, i.e., error 'correction', etc." (Long and Robinson, 1998, p. 16).

Though we know that this is the way in which English is taught in most Japanese schools, we have reason to expect that English instruction in elementary schools can be different. As mentioned above, English is supposed to be taught in elementary schools via "experiential activities" so as "to foster interest and desire"; moreover, the teaching of English literacy skills is to be avoided so that children will not develop "a dislike of English" (MOE, 2001a, Foreword). The Committee report also clearly states that the content currently taught in junior high schools should not be taught as it is in elementary schools for this same reason. Thus we may well be able to expect somewhat different approaches to be used in elementary schools.

As alternatives to the focus on forms approach, Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998) describe the "focus on meaning" approach and the "focus on form" (without an "s" after "form") approach. The latter is often abbreviated "FonF". The pure "noninterventionalist" approach, i.e., "focus on meaning without any instruction of forms", is justified by the assertion that an L2 can be learned

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implicitly and incidentally, and therefore comprehensible input of the target language samples is sufficient for acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Krashen and Terrell, 1983). On the other hand, the FonF approach is based on the belief that even though language is basically learned while the focus is on meaning, "some kind of focus on form is useful to some extent, for some forms, for some students, at some point in the learning process" (de Keyser, 1998, p. 42). The crucial distinction between the focus on forms and the FonF approaches lies in the fact that the former "always entails isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or communicative activity," while the latter "entails a prerequisite engagement in meaning before attention to linguistic features can be expected to be effective" (Doughty and Williams, 1998, p. 3).

In addition to these three broad classifications of teaching methodology—"focus on forms," "focus on meaning" and "FonF"—some related concepts and terms were used to analyze classroom practice in this study. One is "reactive focus on form", which refers to cases in which focusing on form occurs after the necessity arises; in contrast, "proactive FonF" involves teachers planning the focus on form in advance (Doughty and Williams, 1998, p. 205). I also use the three-fold distinction in drill types—"mechanical, meaningful and communicative drills"—originally conceptualized by Paulston (1971) and borrowed by de Keyser (1998) in his discussion of FonF from the cognitive perspective. Briefly, mechanical drills are purely form-focused exercises in which no attention is paid to meaning. De Keyser gives as an example of a mechanical drill the transformation of "I ate an apple. What did you eat?" to "You ate an apple" (1998, p. 50). Meaningful drills are drills that focus some attention on meaning but offer no communicative content which the listener does not already know. An example would be asking, while holding up an ordinary pencil which can hardly be mistaken as a pen, "Is this a pen or a pencil?" (de Keyser's example in de Keyser, 1998, p. 50). Finally, communicative drills are drills that include communicative content, such as asking, "What did you do this weekend?" when you don't know the answer (de Keyser's example in de Keyser, 1998, p. 50).

One other tool that was employed to analyze English interaction in the classrooms is a contrast which L1 acquisition researchers often use to analyze small children's lexical variety, namely, the distinction between "tokens" and "types" when counting utterances. In this type of analysis, "token" refers to every observed utterance, while "type" means utterances which vary in content and/or wording. Thus, if a teacher says, "That's right" three times, these utterances are considered to be three tokens, whereas they are counted as one type. In this study, the total token count reflects the *amount* of English input and output in each class, while the type count indicates the *variety* of constructions used in this interaction.

The analytical tools used in this study are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Analytical Tools

English Input	English Output
Total Tokens and Types of English Utterances	Total Tokens and Types of English Utterances
Function of Each Utterance	Function of Each Utterance
* For meaning	* For meaning
* For focus on form	* For focus on form
* For forms	* For forms
As mechanical drills	As mechanical drills
As meaningful drills	As meaningful drills
As communicative drills	As communicative drills

METHOD

Sampled Classrooms and Their Characteristics

Since Japanese schools are still quite closed, classrooms were observed on the basis of entry permission (a convenience sample), rather than on a more systematic selection scheme. Most of these schools were located in western Japan, where access was attained through personal and professional connections. Observations were carried out from January to May 2001. More classrooms were observed during the same period, but only 11 lessons are reported here. These were taught by eight different teachers who granted permission to videotape (10 lessons) or audiotape (1 lesson) their classes. Six were lessons given in public schools, and five were in private schools. Four of the classes were taught by native English-speaking teachers—two by a full-time teacher and two by a part-time teacher. The other seven classes were taught by Japanese teachers. Two of these were taught by part-time teachers who have qualifications to teach English, three were taught by full-timers who taught only English at that school, and the other two were taught by the children's homeroom teachers, who started to teach English as an experiment⁵. Thus, the lessons observed represent a variety of situations in terms of the language backgrounds and employment conditions of the teacher and the type of school (public or private) in which they were conducted. However, the researcher acknowledges that the sample is rather small.

Information on the sampled classrooms and their teachers is summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Characteristics of Observed Classes

Classroom Number	Grade	School Type	Teacher's Native Language	Teacher's Status
1	6	Private	English	Full-timer, not homeroom teacher
2	3	Private	English	Full-timer, not homeroom teacher
3	4	Private	Japanese	Part-timer, not homeroom teacher
4	5	Private	Japanese	Full-timer, not homeroom teacher
5	4	Private	Japanese	Full-timer, not homeroom teacher
6	4	Public	Japanese	Homeroom teacher
7	3	Public	Japanese	Homeroom teacher
8	2	Public	English	Part-timer, not homeroom teacher
9	5	Public	English	Part-timer, not homeroom teacher
10	4	Public	Japanese	Part-timer, not homeroom teacher
11	5	Public	Japanese	Full-timer, not homeroom teacher

Data and Coding

One whole lesson (40 - 45 minutes) in each classroom was video- or audiotaped and transcribed to reveal the total number (tokens) and types of English utterances produced by the teacher, videotapes, computers or other English input sources in the classroom, as well as the functions of these utterances (English input to the students). The total tokens and types of English utterances produced by the students (English output by the students) and other types of responses such as utterances in Japanese or actions and their functions were also analyzed.

All utterances except for those in songs and those exchanged in individualized practice were coded using the categories of "focus for meaning", "FonF", and "focus for formS" (Table 1). Examples 1, 2, and 3 below are taken from the transcribed data and provided here as examples of input and output for formS, and for meaning, and for FonF, respectively.

Example 1: Input and Output for FormS

(Class 1)

(After some explanation on the target sentence pattern and new words)

Teacher: *Ja ichido minna iimasho.* [OK, let's say this once together.]

He plays volleyball on Wednesday.

Students: He plays volleyball on Wednesday.

(The students continued to practice the same sentence construction with different sports and different days of the week inserted into it.)

Example 2 : Input and Output for Meaning

(Class 4)

This is an excerpt from a class in which the teacher integrates English language instruction with instruction of other academic subjects (in this particular lesson, math). The interaction occurred after the introduction of the term *foot* and its relationship with *inches* (the new concept for the day, the class having learned the concept of *inch* in the previous lesson). The teacher was trying to familiarize the students with the concept, *foot*, and have them describe their height in feet as well as in inches.

Teacher: (*Holding an inch ruler the students had used in their homework to measure their own height*) We have a ruler.

OK, this is twelve, twelve inches.

How tall are you?

I have 72 inches.

I am very tall for a Japanese.

72 inches equal (*with a rising intonation*)

Students: Six (*meaning "six feet"*).

Example 3 : Input and Output for FonF

(Class 4)

This is an excerpt from the same lesson as the one that includes Example 2.

Teacher: 24 inches equal (*with a rising intonation*)?

Students: Two foot.

Teacher: Not foot....

Students: Feet⁶.

The utterances in songs were excluded from the analysis because the particular songs sung in the observed lessons happened to be rather difficult in terms of their linguistic level, and thus it was judged that they were used as a warm-up tool to create an "English atmosphere" at the beginning of the class, rather than as linguistic materials to learn from. The utterances in individualized practice were not coded due to the inability to record all of the students at the same time. However, the content of such practice will be mentioned and a rough estimate of the English exchange will be given in the Results section. Utterances for forms observed in two of the classes were further categorized according to whether they were mechanical, meaningful or communicative drills. Onsite field notes were taken and used to aid the analysis.

The present researcher coded all the data. To ensure reliability, another rater, a college-level English instructor, was asked to code 6% of the data onto the transcript while watching the video. The present researcher first explained the concepts of focus on formS, focus on meaning, and FonF to the second rater and provided examples of each type of interaction, showing typical examples in the videotaped data of the present study taken from sections of the tapes that the second rater was not asked to code. The second rater then coded 6% of the total input and output utterances made during all observed classes, which were taken from the initial utterances in Classes 1, 4, 10, and 11—a representative sample

of each type of lesson observed in terms of teaching pedagogy (as explained in the Results section below). Inter-rater reliability was 91 %⁷.

The data from Classes 2 and 8 were chosen to further categorize the formS utterances by drill type: mechanical, meaningful or communicative drills. The present researcher coded the whole data set and the second rater, after receiving an explanation with some examples from the data of Class 2, coded the input utterances of Class 8 (147 total tokens). Inter-rater reliability was 81%⁸.

RESULTS

As explained above, utterances exchanged for forms and meaning were analyzed in terms of the total tokens (number) and types (variety) of input and output utterances. These figures are compiled in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Analysis of Utterances for Forms and Meaning

Class Number	Forms				Meaning			
	Tokens		Types		Tokens		Types	
	Input	Output	Input	Output	Input	Output	Input	Output
1	105	47	59	31	3	0	3	0
2	238	158	121	73	18	0	9	0
3	57	22	33	11	9	0	9	0
8	147	112	130	95	17	0	9	0
9	76	55	76	53	36	2	21	2
10	152	106	57	27	35	3	32	3
11	32	32	31	26	91	40	73	31
4	0	1	0	1	170	37	159	33
5	118	138	118	122	125	23	122	19
6	26 (176)*	2	9 (124)*	2	0 (176)*	0	0 (124)*	0
7	0 (114)*	4	0 (85)*	4	7 (114)*	6	7 (85)*	6

* The numbers in parentheses are the input utterances provided by *Eigorian*.

As Table 3 shows, Classes 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10 (the first classes shown in the table) used formS-based instruction, whereas Classes 4, 5 and 11 (the ones presented in the middle of the table) used much English for meaning. By definition, instances of FonF can occur only in lessons focusing primarily on meaning. In fact, they were observable only in two of the classrooms (Classes 4 and 5) which used much of the English interaction for meaning. These instances will be discussed in the section concerning Classes with Focus on Form.

The practice of classes 6 and 7 (the last two shown in Table 3) needs to be discussed separately, as it appeared to combine two approaches. The numbers in the parentheses in Table 3 under the first input figures shown for these classes indicate English input provided by a TV program called *Eigorian*. The total utterance tokens input by *Eigorian* appears twice in the table, as does the total number of utterance types input by *Eigorian*, because the function of the input from this program may differ. This will be explained in the section describing these two classes (Classes with a Mixture of Focus on Meaning and Focus on FormS).

As explained above, the utterances for formS in formS-based classrooms 2 and 8 were further analyzed by examining the types of drills employed. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Total Tokens in Mechanical, Meaningful, and Communicative Drills in Classes 2 and 8

Type of Drill	Class 2		Class 8	
	Input	Output	Input	Output
Mechanical Drills	216	111	102	81
Meaningful Drills	0	20	35	21
Communicative Drills	22	27	10	10

Looking at Table 4, we find that Class 2 and Class 8, which were both heavily formS-oriented, used their input and output in English mostly for mechanical drills rather than for meaningful or communicative drills.

Classrooms with Focus on FormS

Classes 1 and 2 were taught by the same native English-speaking teacher, the full-time English specialist at the private elementary school where the classes took place. Both classes were very much formS-focused. On the day they were observed, class 1 worked on the structure, "She plays tennis/does judo/swims on Monday," while Class 2 worked on the question-and-answer structures, "What subject do you like?" / "I like English and computer, but I don't like P.E.", and "What do (did) you have for breakfast?" / "I have (had) bacon and eggs for breakfast." The first class was for sixth graders and the second for

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third graders, but the two classes looked similar in the sense that neither the complexity of the language focused on nor the amount of English used in the two classes was differentiated to reflect the three-year age difference between the two groups of students. The drills moved from mechanical, meaningful to communicative as the core sentence structures and necessary lexical items were introduced (Table 4).

The three different kinds of drills seemed to be combined very skillfully. First, the students simply repeated a sentence such as "I like science", Then, prompted by a picture on the computer screen showing a person who liked Math, they said "She likes Math". Finally, the teacher asked each student which subject s/he truly liked. The students were attentive and were able to produce the target structures with fairly good pronunciation on the day of observation, although the teacher told me that the students in the upper grades were usually very restless and difficult to teach. The students' comprehension and production of the target English structures appeared to be fairly good, especially when their achievement was compared with the other classrooms taught in a very similar way (for example, Class 3, which was taught by a rather new Japanese teacher of English, and Classes 6 and 7, which were in their first year of using this type of teaching).

As seen in Table 3, the teacher of Class 3 took the focus on formS approach as well. On the particular day when this class of fourth graders was observed, half of the class time was spent playing a spelling game with eleven target words. The game began with the teacher reading all eleven words aloud with the students. The students were then divided into groups of four or five. The teacher then said one word at a time, and the groups of students competed against each other to find appropriate letters scattered on the table to spell the word with. The goal was to understand the English letter-and-sound correspondence in the presented words.

During the other half of the class time, the students used computer software that showed pictures of several words starting with the same letter in the alphabet. The students could listen to the sound of the word by clicking on the corresponding picture. After some practice, they took a word recognition quiz in which they heard a word and were asked to click on the corresponding picture. This portion of the interaction was not coded because the students practiced individually. Generally, each student listened to around 10 different words a few times each by clicking on the corresponding pictures on the computer screen. There was no chance for them to practice pronouncing these words as output.

The class looked very restless. The class size was quite large (40 students for one teacher). Even though these students had had English one hour per week since the first grade, they did not seem to have much knowledge of it. As Table 3 shows, very little English input or output was observed in this class.

Classes 8 and 9 were taught by a part-time English instructor who was a native English speaker. He had been teaching the two classes (Class 8, a second-grade class and Class 9, a fifth-grade class) for half a year. A different native English-speaking teacher had taught them for the other half year. The instructor was completely free to decide how to teach these classes; no discussion with any other teacher in the school seemed to have taken place before or after the classes.

As was the case with Classes 1 and 2, which were also taught by a single native English-speaking

teacher, the contents of Classes 8 and 9 looked identical. As shown in Table 3, they were formS-based, focusing on some nouns first, then, the combination of a noun and an action word, for example, "the lion is sleeping." Finally, terms for colors and locations were attached to the sentences practiced previously (e.g., "The white duck is sleeping on the red car."). A difference between the two classes was observable, however, in terms of the students' attention and speed in producing the linguistic forms they were taught; the 5th graders appeared to be making much better use of the time.

Even though the sentences the students practiced described rather unrealistic facts, such as "The pink hippopotamus is under the white, pink and brown bed," and the class time was spent entirely on the practice of these patterns, the students did not look bored. Perhaps because the teacher inserted some communicative drills (e.g., "Do you have a brown dog?"), and because the students were getting English lessons for the first time this academic year, they seemed to enjoy the lesson very much. The homeroom teacher also commented that they seemed to enjoy the lesson partly because the teacher was a native English speaker with a typical "foreigner's" appearance to the students' eyes. Although some of the second graders had difficulty keeping their attention on the class activities, the fifth graders were very attentive and were able to produce fairly long sentences using the target patterns. It was difficult, however, to foresee how the knowledge gained during this year would be accumulated and integrated in the following year's lessons, since it was obvious that the lesson observed was not a part of a well-planned English curriculum for the entire year.

Class 10 was taught by a part-time teacher who was an English specialist. Even though this class also gave focus on formS instruction, it had more input for meaning in terms of total types of utterances than the five classes we have discussed so far, as can be seen in Table 3. Such input was given in the form of the teacher's instructions on what to do next (e.g., "Stand up please") and authentic questions or comments (e.g., "Do you like this story?" and "You are right"). The target linguistic item practiced during the observed lesson was asking and telling time, as in, "What time is it?" and "It's just one". However, the teacher tried to create a meaningful situation in which this type of interaction could naturally occur. She mentioned names of a Chinese person and a British person whom the students knew, and asked "What time is it now in China?" and "What time is it now in England?"

The students were attentive and could say the correct time in English as a group, although there were occasions in which a number of students were unable to comprehend the teacher's English. The situation was very similar to that described for Class 9 above, although the students in this class were third graders, while those in Class 9 were fifth graders, so the level of performance in Class 9 was higher.

One interesting thing was noticed in this class. There were four occasions when the students repeated what the teacher said, even though her intention was to ask an authentic question or make a comment. This automatic repetition made me wonder if the students had become used to repeating everything in their previous English lessons with this teacher. If that is the case, it is a serious side effect of teaching through a lot of mechanical drilling. This observation forms a sharp contrast with the students' quick, meaningful responses in Japanese or non-verbal responses to the teacher's English in Classes 4 and 5, to which we will now turn.

Classes with Focus on Form (Classes 4 and 5)

Classes 4 and 5 were taught by a full-time English teacher who was a native speaker of Japanese. These classes were very different from the five classes we have discussed so far (see Table 3) in that they were conducted focusing mostly on content. The teacher tried to plan a series of three class periods around a single theme, such as "raising corn", "measuring in inches and feet", or "the ideal room". The lesson observed in Class 4 was the second class period on the theme "measuring in inches and feet", while that observed in Class 5 was the first lesson on "the ideal room".

The teacher rarely spoke Japanese to the students, and all of the English input from the teacher except for four utterances was intended to communicate academic content rather than to teach specific forms. The four "exceptional" utterances were given when the teacher needed to focus on form, as shown in Examples 3 through 6 below.

Example 3

(Class 4)

Teacher: 24 inches equal (*with a rising intonation*)?

Students: Two foot.

Teacher: Not foot....

Students: Feet.

Example 4

(Class 4)

Students: *Roku* ["six" in Japanese]

Teacher: *Roku*?

Students: Six

Examples 5 and 6

(Class 4)

Students: Six *senchi* ["centimeter" in Japanese]

Teachers: Six *senchi*?

Teacher: I am six feet tall.

In Example 3, the teacher was correcting the wrong form *foot*, which should be *feet*, by giving direct negative feedback to the students. In Example 4, the students' Japanese response (*roku*) was repeated with rising intonation so that the students would say it in English. In Examples 5 and 6, the students' wrong form (*senchi* [centimeter], instead of the correct form, *feet*) was repeated, and then the correct form was presented in a full sentence, "I am six feet tall." These are typical examples of reactive FonF.

All the rest of the English input from the teacher was given in order to transmit instructional content: namely, how long one inch is, how to describe the students' height in feet and inches, and how to make a ruler using a ribbon. The students' utterances were also all for communicating meaningful messages except for one time, when they repeated "one foot" to make sure that they could memorize this phrase.

An interesting phenomenon in the students' output in Class 4 as well as Class 5 was the fact that the

students responded to the teacher's English and actions spontaneously, without any reservation despite their limited knowledge of English. They responded in English if they could, as in Example 7, and if they could not, they responded in Japanese, as in Example 8. If they were not sure what the teacher meant they even walked up to him and clarified it in Japanese, as in Example 9.

Example 7

(Class 5)

Teacher: Please color the living room and the dining room. Hum, which color (shall we use)?

Students: Light blue!

Example 8 (*Creating a rather unrealistic "ideal" room by putting many things in it*)

(Class 5)

Teacher: I have a computer on the desk.

(*Then adding a bathtub near the bed*) I need to take a bath.

Students: *Ee?* Bed *ga nureruyo*. [What? Your bed will get wet!]

Example 9

(Class 5)

Teacher: I am going to tell you (which one is) your room. This is your room.

Students: *Sonna hosoin desu ka?* [Is our room that small?]

Teacher: I am very big and you are so small, so I need a big room.

Students: *Ee? Sensei, small house desho.* [What? Mr. X, you have a small house, don't you?]

One student: (*After standing up and walking up to the teacher*)

Sensei, chotto okiki shitain desu kedo, kore tte jibun no ima no heya wo kakun desu ka?

[Mr. X, I have a question. Do you want us to draw the actual room we have right now (at home)?]

All of these three types of responses were frequently observed in Classes 4 and 5, which made the classroom extremely interactive. Even though the students' English knowledge was limited, they tried to understand the message transmitted by the teacher via English, and since no one in the class had any special background (because they were a returnee, had native English-speaking parents, or had taken English lessons), they were not afraid to show their occasional imperfect understanding of the teacher's English.

As opposed to the lesson observed in Class 4, in which most of the input from the teacher was for meaning, the one observed in Class 5, being the first class on the theme "the ideal room," included some class time devoted to the introduction of new vocabulary related to housing (focus on forms) at the beginning of the class. Objects found in a house were presented on the computer monitor using vocabulary-building software, which presented the English word for each object with music. This was followed by recognition quizzes. The students repeated the words and enjoyed the quizzes as a class (not individually). The large quantity of input and output for forms in Class 5 which is shown in Table 3 was observed in this part of the lesson. A proactive focus on form to teach expressions for locations was

also observed in the middle of a content-based activity. At that time, the teacher had the students practice phrases to express locations, as shown in Example 10 below. In describing the ideal room that he was creating on the board, the teacher tried to elicit expressions such as "on the wall" or "by the desk" by using a rising intonation and then stopping in the middle of his sentence, thereby indicating that he wanted the students to supply the appropriate expression of location and finish the sentence.

Example 10

(Class 5)

Teacher: (*Placing a picture of a desk and a picture of a chair on the picture of the room, which is on the board*)

I have a desk and I have a chair.

I have a chair (*with a rising intonation*)...

Students: ... by the desk.

Thus, Class 5 included: (1) much input and output for meaning, (2) some input and output for forms, namely, practice of the new words related to housing, and (3) a total of 13 exchanges about expressions of location, which can be classified as proactive FonF, as well as two other exchanges for FonF.

The students in Classes 4 and 5 were fully attentive—sometimes even overly excited. They were extremely responsive, exhibited good comprehension of the teacher's English, and if they did not understand something, they even negotiated its meaning. One especially important phenomenon in these classes was that the students were using English as a means of understanding what the teacher wanted them to learn or do, as well as communicating their own intentions, instead of repeating every English word or phrase they heard!

Classes with a Mixture of Focus on Meaning and Focus on FormS (Classes 6, 7, and 11)

Classes 6 and 7 were two classes with unique practices of English teaching, since they were taught by homeroom teachers who had no special training in teaching English. The instructors had just started to teach English in the year the class was observed, so their practices were still at an experimental stage.

During the observed lessons, both classes showed *Eigorian*, a 15-minute English teaching program produced by *Nippon Hoso Kyokai* (NHK, Japan's public broadcasting company—roughly equivalent to the BBC). Class 6 viewed an *Eigorian* program centered around the expression, "Where is my cap?" The program was designed for third and fourth graders. Interesting stories, actors' performances and visual aids were abundant, sometimes being directly linked to the expression for the day, and other times, related to it more loosely. Even though the actions and speeches looked rather exaggerated, watching how completely attentive and excited the students in Classes 6 and 7 were, the present researcher was led to believe that the program was interesting as well as challenging for them.

After the show, the teacher in Class 6 asked only comprehension questions about a story in *Eigorian*, rather than giving linguistic explanations of the English in it. In this portion of the show, three characters who were having *sukiyaki* (a Japanese dish with cooked beef and vegetables) for dinner were

looking for beef in vain. The teacher asked the students who had eaten up all the beef, and the student successfully gave the correct answer. Since the teacher did not analyze the English linguistically at the time while viewing the show, the 15 minutes of watching *Eigorian* in class seemed to function as an activity with a focus on meaning to some extent. However, some portions of the program presented the expression (the day repeatedly, although these portions were carefully embedded in meaningful contexts. The function of the input may therefore actually differ for individual students, depending on what form and content each student paid attention to. Thus the input utterances from *Eigorian* are difficult to categorize using Doughty and Williams' three functions. In Table 3, they are therefore presented twice in parentheses—in both the focus on formS and focus on meaning categories.

During the remaining class time, the teacher of Class 6 used two kinds of activities designed to practice the following expressions: "Where is ...?" and "It's under/on/in..." in one exercise, and "Turn right/left" and "Go straight" in the other exercise. These exercises did not go too well, since, for one thing the teacher did not notice beforehand that her students were unable to pronounce some of the English words written on the exercise sheet. It was apparent that the students' comprehension of the new language was very good, but when it came to being productive in English, they needed far greater support to ensure the expected performance.

Class 7 was conducted in a similar way to Class 6. An *Eigorian* program which featured colors was viewed in this class. As was the case in Class 6, the input utterances from *Eigorian* observed in this class are presented in parentheses in both categories in Table 3. After the show, the teacher gave the students a sheet of paper that had a drawing of a pizza and many different types of toppings on it. The children's task was to choose one topping they liked and color it, cut it out and paste it on the pizza. Most of these instructions were given in Japanese, but the teacher asked each child the color of the topping s/he chose and encouraged him or her to say it in English.

Class 11 was at one of the experimental schools appointed by MOE, and thus the school had accumulated a richer range of pedagogical strategies than the regular public schools I visited. In this school, for example, students experienced songs, games, student-initiated plays using English, chatting online with students in Hawaii, and other activities. On the day this class was observed, the largest portion of the class was devoted to practicing how to interview a foreigner in town. This interview practice was nothing but a purely mechanical practice of about 10 questions and answers. Although the practice involving the whole class was coded, the individualized practice in pairs was not recorded or coded. It seemed, however, that each pair practiced the dialogue at least once or twice and after that, the pairs were videotaped by their teacher so that they could review their performance later.

Even though the practice itself appeared to be rather monotonous, there happened to be a total stranger in class on that day (the present researcher), whom the students could try asking anything they had practiced or wanted to ask. Two volunteers managed to ask questions of their choice, and the whole class paid attention to what the present researcher said. Because of this, and because the teacher made great efforts to give most directions in English, this class contained much more interaction for meaning than other classes taking the formS-based approach. (The number of utterances for meaning as well as

for forms exchanged in this classroom are presented in Table 3.) Thus, with some pedagogical innovation, it is possible to provide a basically formS-based classroom with very rich contexts, so that the interaction in English can become as communicative as possible.

However, I noticed two things that implied possible limitations of the practice of this school. One was use of *katakana* (Japanese phonetic symbols) by the students to write down English words. As mentioned in the introduction, MOE discourages teaching English literacy skills in elementary schools, so the students are usually not taught how to read English. Nevertheless, since the interview the students were working on was too long for the students' rote memory, they needed some way to record it. Therefore they all wrote *katakana* pronunciation guides underneath their role-play practice sentences. (It appeared that they had done this after hearing the teacher model the role-play.) Since they had little knowledge of letter-pronunciation correspondence, one whole group of students who sat at the same table had written the sounds incorrectly. For example, underneath the phrase: "May I ask you some questions?", they had written:

メイ アイ イクスキューズ ミーサム クエスチョン?
[Mei ai ikusukyuzu misamu kuesuchon?]

This reads something like: "May I excuse me some questions?"—a mixture of "Excuse me" and "May I ask you some questions?" In this dialogue, these two sentences appeared close to each other. When the three pairs of children sitting at the table in question were practicing these lines, their homeroom teacher was videotaping them, but she did not correct them at all. Possibly she did not notice the error due to her own lack of English proficiency, or alternatively, she may have foregone correcting it because of the MOE policy not to correct "small details".

The other noticeable point was the issue of exposing the students to limited English speakers. There has been a debate on this for a long time. One position says that it is a good thing to show the homeroom teacher, who herself/himself has limited English ability, courageously speaking English, because such a positive attitude is contagious and the students learn it from him/her. The other position claims that in the EFL (English as a foreign language, rather than English as a second language) situation, the best-tuned target language input can be provided only in the language classroom, so the teacher should be the best source of rich input of the target language. We will return to this issue in the discussion section.

DISCUSSION

Observation of the 11 classrooms and analysis of the English used in them revealed that: (1) The majority of the lessons used the focus on formS approach; and (2) The focus on forms approach seemed to be accepted favorably by students under certain circumstances. The study also suggest that: (3) The content of English lessons needs to be intellectually appropriate, especially for higher-grade students; and (4) There are some limitations in the policies advocated by MOE. These will be discussed in detail below.

Predominant Use of Focus on FormS Approach

Though they did not use grammatical terms such as "be verb" or "SVO," the majority of the observed lessons were conducted focusing on formS. There was some variation of the amount of input and output exchanged in English; Classes 1 and 2 provided more input and output than Class 3, for example. However, most interaction was for the sake of practicing forms rather than for communicating real content. Furthermore, when the types of drills used (mechanical drills, meaningful drills and communicative drills) were examined, it was found that the majority of the interactions in the classrooms centered on mechanical drills (Table 4).

This is fully understandable, since the synthetic approach has been the pedagogical tradition in many English teaching classrooms in Japan. However, as was explicated in Long and Robinson's (1998) and de Keyser's (1998) summaries of language teaching research, accumulated data indicate that a second language is not acquired in the order that most synthetic curriculums expect it to be. Instead, second language acquisition (SLA) is facilitated when the focus is basically on meaning, communicative exchange is experienced in the target language, and if problems regarding forms are treated at the right time. When we view SLA in this way, lessons which rely on mechanical drills in a rigid manner might not be the best way to nurture "communicative ability", which MOE has stressed in this new move to introduce English education at the elementary school level.

Limited Acceptance of Focus on FormS Approach

Lessons that took the rather rigid focus on formS approach seemed to be accepted favorably by students if they were mixed with communicative drills and if they were taught by a native English speaking teacher. But even under such circumstances, interest seemed to last only for the initial few years. Recall the comment by the teacher who taught Classes 1 and 2 (who is a native English speaker himself): "the upper-grade students are usually very restless and difficult to teach". Furthermore, if the lessons relied heavily on mechanical drilling, the students formed the habit of viewing English as mere sounds that they should automatically repeat, rather than as a language to use for communicating their thoughts (as seen in Class 10)⁹.

Need for Intellectually Appropriate Content

The content of the formS-based teaching looked more or less the same across the different grades observed. For example, at one school, a third grade and a sixth grade class used materials of a similar level, and at another school, one second grade and one fifth grade class used identical material. This is probably because one lesson per week could not build up the students' language skills over the years. Thus, the teachers had to do the same basic things in the higher grades as they did in the lower grades¹⁰. The students' concentration was obviously better in the upper grades, and they seemed to be learning the forms more quickly. However, this was probably true only as far as such lessons were still fresh to the students.

As a consequence, formS-based lessons seemed to lose their attraction for the students as the

grade level increased and as time passed after English instruction had started. The gap between the children's intellectual level and the level of the exercises as well as the content transmitted via English became wider and wider. In addition, private school children became busier due to their need to prepare for entrance exams for junior high schools, which also contributed to their loss of interest in English.

There were two classes (4 and 5) taught by one full-time private school English teacher whose lessons were organized with a basic focus on meaning but occasional shifting of attention to form (the FonF approach in Long and Robinson's [1998] terminology). His lessons could be called mini-English immersion lessons. His students were very interested in these lessons because the content was chosen carefully in order to match the students' intellectual level. The lessons in these two classes provided an ideal environment for English acquisition when we view second language acquisition in the way we have been discussing in this paper.

However, for this type of lesson to be possible, the teacher's English proficiency must be very high, since s/he has to speak in English during the whole class time. It is also desirable that the instructor be a full-time teacher in the school so that s/he can cooperate with other teachers to integrate the English lessons into the rest of the curriculum and also so that s/he can know the students very well. In addition, teaching English with a content-based syllabus is such a new idea in Japan that we need good and ample teacher training to produce more teachers like the one we observed in Classes 4 and 5¹¹.

The classes observed also included two taught by two different full-time teachers who taught their own homeroom students using *Eigorian*, an NHK English teaching television program. These classes were conducted with the focus on meaning to some extent, at least while the teachers showed the program to the students. The teachers had a clear idea that pure formS-oriented lessons were not what they preferred or what would work with their students. However, since they did not know much English or foreign language acquisition/pedagogy, they were at a loss as to what to do after showing *Eigorian*. These teachers need much support from ESL specialists to continue to experiment in their classes. By the same token, adding a meaningful activity into an originally formS-based lesson, an example of which was observed in Class 11, requires advanced pedagogical skills on the part of the teacher (and desirably, some additional resources, such as special guests, computer(s) with access to the Internet, and sister schools overseas).

MOE Guideline Limitations

The teacher in Class 11 used to be in the same predicament as those in Classes 6 and 7; that is, he was a public elementary school teacher who was not a specialist of English by training. However, he had been well trained by the time of our observation, because the school had been serving as an MOE-appointed experimental school for several years. Since this teacher had substantial support and guidance from various English specialists and native English-speaking teachers as well as education specialists, he was quite comfortable designing and leading activities in English in the observed classroom.

However, one problem noticed in observing his class was the use of Japanese phonetic symbols (*kana*) by students to make up for their lack of systematic training in reading and writing English. The

other problem was the limited oral English ability of the teacher. If the teacher's English is that of a very limited non-native variety, there is little hope that the students can learn much English. Personally, as a trainer of English teachers at the secondary school level, I cannot help feeling that this type of English is not the optimum input. However, if in place of such untrained elementary school teachers, English specialists such as *juku* (cram school) teachers and junior high school teachers were brought in to elementary schools without clearly stated pedagogy and appropriate teaching materials (which do not exist at present), there is a possibility that they may be fond of the most rigid type of formS-based instruction and use it at elementary schools. This may allow students to be exposed to good English, but only with irrelevant and unattractive pedagogy. Therefore, in order to avoid the worst scenarios, we should not think that bringing good English speakers into elementary classrooms alone (in other words without sufficient training relevant to teaching at this level) is the solution to the problems we have now.

I hasten to add, however, that the present study is not free from limitation, as was mentioned at the beginning. Only a small number of classes were observed. Even though the present study tried to present a slice of the reality in various types of English classrooms on ordinary days, further studies on a much larger scale are essential to confirm the findings and implications presented above.

CONCLUSION

Given the complicated framework for introducing English into elementary schools in Japan and the resulting opaqueness of the desired practice, this paper tried to investigate what is currently going on inside English classrooms and to analyze English interaction in them, using the framework presented by Doughty and Williams (1998) and Long and Robinson (1998): the three-fold distinction of "focus on forms, focus on meaning, and focus on form".

The practices in 11 classrooms in both public and private schools, with teachers of differing linguistic and professional backgrounds were observed. The analysis revealed that the majority of the classrooms, namely, Classes 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10, were using the focus on formS approach with varying degrees of "success", depending on factors such as the instructor, length of experience with English lessons, and the amount of communicative drills inserted. Lessons with the focus on form (without an 's') approach were observed in Classes 4 and 5. In these lessons the students were involved in activities appropriate to their intellectual level, and therefore were fully attentive and extremely responsive, and exhibited good comprehension of the teacher's English. Lessons by homeroom teachers who were not trained to be English specialists (Classes 6 and 7) suggested urgent need for teacher training. Observation of a classroom in an experimental school appointed by MOE (Class 11) revealed an example of a mixture of teaching with the focus on formS approach and with the focus on meaning approach, but it also pointed to some of the limitations of teaching English within the current framework at elementary schools: namely, the lack of advanced English proficiency on the part of the instructor and insufficient time to teach basic skills.

Based on what could be seen in the practices of the 11 observed classrooms, we can foresee great difficulty in conducting English classes in elementary schools in the near future. Since formS-based

instruction seems to be the most prevalent approach, with the maximum of one hour (or very rarely two hours) per week allocated for English lessons within the present framework, it will become more difficult to teach English as the grade level increases. Unless we increase the number of hours of teaching (even in periods shorter than a full 40-minute period for each lesson), a solid accumulation of English knowledge cannot be expected, and this, in turn, will lead to lessons in the upper grades that are intellectually inappropriate.

If more meaning-oriented instruction, i.e., the FonF approach in Doughty and William's (1998) terms (or even a combination of "focus on meaning" activities and "focus on forms" elements integrated in one lesson) is to be pursued, interesting lessons, student motivation to use English for communication, and at least some receptive knowledge of English vocabulary and structures may possibly be developed. However, the difficulty of this option is that much training both in English and pedagogical skills on the part of the teachers will be necessary. If neither direction is pursued to solve the expected problem, "English lessons" may become difficult to conduct at worst, and even when students manage to be engaged in them to some extent, those lessons will not develop much knowledge of English or academic content.

Some may argue that teaching objectives other than developing language skills—for example, "motivating students to study English"—are as important as, or even more important than, developing English proficiency. However, motivation for learning a language is not completely separate from the ability to use that language, as the classic motivation study by Strong (1984) shows. Learners learn more when they are motivated, but they sometimes become motivated because they know that they are learning well. The opposite is also true, as evidenced by a comment made by a sixth grader in one of the 65 experimental schools, who said she had developed a dislike of English in the upper grades due to her inability to comprehend what her teacher said in English¹². Therefore there is a great need to improve the curriculum and the pedagogy so as not to make the Integrated Studies hours allocated to English an utter waste.

These classroom observations also suggested the obvious necessity of more and better teacher training. Although there is merit in homeroom teachers' involvement in English instruction, serious limitations should also be recognized. In addition to bringing in more English specialists (specifically trained to teach at the elementary school level), at least some in-service training in teaching English as a second language should be urgently given to all elementary school homeroom teachers in the country who will be assigned to teach it.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper with a slightly different data set was presented at the Third Annual Conference of the Japanese Society for Language Sciences, Japan Women's University, Nishi-Ik Campus, June 23 -24, 2001.
2. This fear seemed to be amplified by the suggestion that Japan should, in the future, consider the possibility of giving English the status of second official language, which was proposed by the Committee *Niju-isseiki nihon no koso* [Japan's Plan for the 21st Century] (chaired by Kawai Hayao, *Asahi Shimbun*, April, 4, 2000, p. 13) around the same time as elementary school English education started to be seriously discussed. The suggestion was explicated (with a much stronger tone) by a Committee member, Funabashi Yoichi, in his book, *Aete eigo koyogo-ron* [I Dare Propose to Make English Official Language] (2000). The proposal comes from the realization of the role English plays in globalization and the resulting belief that Japan needs to keep up with the rest of the world by increasing its number of proficient English speakers. Funabashi (2000) claims, for example, that Japan needs to increase the number of functional Japanese-English bilinguals so that they comprise 30% of the nation's total population. Heated debates were observed in the mass media for a year so following the release of the Committee proposal. Ideas brought up to oppose this proposal included the belief that a second official language was supposed to function as a protector of linguistic minority's rights rather than to give a special position to one of many foreign languages (*Asahi Shimbun*, March 22, 2000, p. 4; *Asahi Shimbun*, April 14, 2000, p. 2).
3. According to a survey by MOE, 20% of the nation's public elementary schools had begun English instruction in some form or other as of November, 2000 (reported in *Asahi Shimbun*, April 2, 2001, p. 11).
4. According to Doughty and Williams (1998, p. 3), this distinction was first introduced by Michael Long in his paper presented in 1988 at the European-North American Symposium on Needed Research in Foreign Language Education, Rockefeller Center, Bellagio, Italy. The present paper mentions this volume compiled by Doughty and Williams instead of this seminal paper by Long because this book presents studies conducted on the issue as well as the original idea.
5. Unlike English lessons in secondary schools, English at the elementary school level can be taught to either proficient speakers of English and/or homeroom teachers, who are, in Japan, not necessarily trained in teaching English nor proficient in it themselves. Since it is especially challenging for the homeroom teachers to teach English, the distinction between instructors who were English specialists and those who were homeroom teachers was considered important here.
6. Unfortunately, people do not always use the word FonF in the same way (see the discussion of terminology in Doughty and Williams, 1998, pp. 3 - 4). The crucial element of FonF in Doughty and Williams's framework (which is based on Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998)) is that FonF "entails a prerequisite engagement in meaning before attention to linguistic features can be expected to be effective" (Doughty and Williams, 1998, p. 3). As will be explained later in the Results section, Example 3 was embedded in a lesson which engaged students in an activity designed to help them understand two different units of measurement (inches and feet)—something that native English-speaking American students would also be likely to learn. During this meaning-focused activity, the students displayed a linguistic problem (differentiating between the singular and plural forms, *foot* and *feet*), so the teacher temporarily shifted the students' attention to form (FonF) in his error-correction move.
7. The major disagreement between the two raters concerned how to code the following type of utterance by the teacher in Class 10: "Make a circle", "Tap your hands", and "Stamp your feet." The teacher meant to ask the students to do these actions, and therefore, we could say that she uttered them for meaning (input for meaning), which is how the second rater classified them. However, the teacher repeated these particular sentences 3 - 5 times (unlike other instructions given in English, which were not repeated) and carried out the instruction herself, after which, the students repeated these instructions 2 - 4 times as well while they followed them. Normally, people repeat a phrase when practicing formS (input for formS), rather than when they use it to communicate their intention. I therefore classified these utterances as input for formS. The results of the analysis presented in the tables are based on the present researcher's judgment.
8. The teacher of Class 2 (a native English-speaker) spoke fluent Japanese and used it to explain grammatical points, give negative and positive feedback, confirm the students' answers and give instructions. When he used English, therefore, he used it mostly for drilling. The type of drill was also easy to identify, because the teacher clearly indicated what they were supposed to say and why (e.g.

"Let's say it once to practice", or "Tell me what you actually ate last night") in Japanese.

On the other hand, the teacher of Class 8 (also a native English-speaker) had limited Japanese ability and rarely used Japanese in the classroom. Therefore, when he uttered a phrase or sentence in English, the same utterance sometimes served multiple functions. For example, one utterance (e.g., "You have a black sweater.") might function as a model for repetition, a genuine question, a means of stressing a grammatical or phonological point (e.g., accurate pronunciation of the word *sweater*), or as a confirmation of a student's answer. When his intention could be identified, it could only be done by interpreting his intonation, pitch, the length of pauses or other points which were observable before or after the utterance. Thus coding the data in this class required much consideration and replaying of the videotape for both raters.

In addition, coding the data from Class 8 seemed more difficult for the second rater because the picture cards the teacher used often and held in his hands were too small to be seen clearly in the videotape, and thus the second rater, who did not observe the lesson in the classroom, was unable to comprehend what was shared in the class at each moment and what the focus of the exchange was. All of these problems contributed to the difficulty of coding this portion of the data and the relatively low rate of inter-rater reliability.

9. Even though findings in applied linguistics are read widely throughout the world, there seems to be variation between countries in adopting findings. Hong Kong, for example, adopted task-based syllabi (a syllabus design compatible with the idea of focus on form) for their English instruction at elementary schools nationwide in 1994 (He, 2001), whereas the English instruction for elementary school children in Korea seems very much formS-focused. In Korea, where English is now a compulsory subject, one textbook is used nationwide, and teachers are provided a CD-ROM that presents the dialogue and song they need to teach in each lesson in this textbook. The CD-ROM and the teacher's manual tell the teacher exactly what s/he needs to do in class (Park, 2001). The content consists of basic daily conversational structures. For example, the key sentences for fifth graders are:
- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. How are you? | 9. Whose boat is this? |
| 2. What day is it today? | 10. Do you want some more? |
| 3. It's under the table. | 11. What are you doing? |
| 4. What a nice day! | 12. This is a bedroom. |
| 5. Where is Nandaemon? | 13. What did you do yesterday? |
| 6. I get up at seven every day. | 14. Is Peter there? |
| 7. She is tall. | 15. Can you join us? |
| 8. Let's go swimming. | 16. Did you have a nice weekend? |
10. It seems that some factors outside of the classroom greatly contribute to the accumulation of English knowledge and thus make a difference in the degree of English acquisition by students in different countries. Typological differences or similarities between the students' L1 and English, the degree of English use in the surrounding society, including the mass media, and the English proficiency of the teachers and parents are among such factors. (Individual differences in aptitude and motivation undoubtedly cause differences among individuals, but the focus here is not on individuals, but on societal differences.) The present researcher observed a total of four elementary school classrooms and two seventh-grade classrooms in Uppsala and Stockholm in Sweden in December 2000. Unlike in Korea or Hong Kong, Sweden gave teachers much more freedom concerning pedagogy, textbooks, and even in which grade to start English instruction--as long as the total number of hours of instruction was secured, the distribution of the instructional hours across grades was free. (This information is based on an interview with Eva Oscarsson, Director of Education of the National Agency for Education in Sweden, in December, 2000). As far as we could observe, no strikingly unique pedagogical techniques were being used, but the seventh graders' English was already extremely good. Both teachers and students said that English was easy because they heard it often from TV, computer games, and during short trips overseas, and thus students could learn it outside the classroom. In addition, because both Swedish and English use the same writing system (except for three additional characters in Swedish), reading English seemed to be extremely easy for Swedish children.
11. He (2001) explains that although task-based syllabi were officially selected for all elementary school English teaching in Hong Kong, the teachers transformed them into more traditional formS-based ones because of their unfamiliarity with task-based instruction.
12. This comment was made in an English class in one of the 65 experimental schools which was televised as *"Kyoiku Today-Shogakko no eigo kyoiku* [Education Today-Elementary School English Education] on NHK on February 17th, 2001.

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