

Speech Activities for Second Language Learners

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Introduction

One of the most difficult classes to teach in Japan is one which involves public speaking activities. In spite of the many speech contests held throughout Japan most Japanese students do not have regular speech classes programmed into their academic schedules in high school. They prefer to remain passive and find it difficult to speak in front of groups to express personal thought and opinions. What I propose to present in this paper are several activities which can be used in a speech class with intermediate level students. I am indebted to the work of Charles LeBeau and David Harrington who have created excellent textbook materials for classes in speech and debate. Many of the activities which I propose in this paper are derived from ideas found in their texts.

1. Voice Inflection: Stress, Stretch, Pause

Japanese students tend to read and recite English in an unaccented monotone. This may be due to several factors one of which is that their own language is not heavily accented and the students are awkward when reciting in public. Therefore, I encourage them to place stress ^, stretch <....> and pause () inflection marks on the text they are prepared to read.

For example:

Stress ^ - I am very tired.

Stretch <.....> - I am ve-e-ery tired

Pause () - I am very tired.

(pg. 26 - Speaking of Speech. Le Beau, Harrington. Macmillan Languagehouse)

2. Recitations

After students have become comfortable with placing voice inflection marks on their work I require them to read a 3-5 minute passage which usually contains story elements and several characters. Students mark the passage with stress ^, stretch <....> and pause () marks and assign different voices to the characters.

Among the passages I have chosen these have been the reading which have proven to be the most popular among the students.

- a. The Giving Tree
- b. The Enormous Turnip
- c. The Beauty and the Beast (Introductory narration of Disney animated film)

- d. The Appointment
- e. Three Billy-Goats

TASK - To narrate a short story and to use different voices to represent the various characters. Also, this requires the practice of using stress, stretch and pause in recitations. No memorization is needed for this exercise.

3. Body Gestures and Mime

Students in speech classes are often too shy to use gestures with any meaning or success. The following activity enables them to mime several actions where body language alone is required to establish communication.

a. Front Desk at a Hotel:

Task: A hotel guest has a problem with the room and must convey the difficulty to the front desk through mime.

b. Operating Machinery:

Task: The student mimes the use of some kind of machinery which is used every day (using tape recorder, copy machines, etc.).

c. Animals:

Task: Students mime various animals (elephant, lion, ostrich, etc.) using only body language.

d. Body Gestures:

Task: Students demonstrate various gestures which have cultural meanings and the class must guess the meaning behind the gesture (e.g. the gesture for money, telephone, 'come here', etc.).

After the student has practiced miming without using words I introduce the following activity which combines gestures with words. This exercise is useful in demonstrating sequence, emphasis and comparison.

- a. *Sequence*: helps the audience understand a process from beginning to end.
- b. *Emphasis*: helps audience to visualize the size, shape and number
- c. *Comparison*: Helps audiences to understand differences, advantages and changes.

I use the exercise of a politician making a campaign speech. Students are required to memorize the speech and deliver it with gestures.

Exercise: HONEST JOHN: “Hi! I’m Honest John. There are three good reasons to vote for me. First, I have longer experience than anyone else in government. Second, I have a powerful program to increase business. Most important, vote for me because I will cut taxes by 5 percent. Thank you.”

Note: All of the underlined words require a gesture.

(Source: page 19 of Speaking of Speech by Le Beau and Harrington)

4. One-Minute Speeches

After students have worked with inflection and gestures I require them to put together an original one-minute speech on a topic of their choice. The topics I would suggest are topics of general interest and familiarity; for example, school, family, hometown, sports, music, foods, vacations and hobbies.

The procedure I follow is rather simple. The students write speeches on B-5 lined paper. They double-space the speech and leave margins for teacher comments. They place markings of stress, stretch and pause. They practice the speech with an assigned partner and finally they deliver the speech to the group.

5. Commercials

Having students put together a one-minute commercial in which they can compare two products of similarity is also an excellent speech activity which can help them to develop presentational skills. In this exercise students are expected to compare two items which are similar yet different. For example:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| a. a digital camera and a throw away camera | e. a video cassette with a DVD |
| b. a bicycle with a motorbike | f. a comic book with a novel |
| c. a CD with a cassette tape | g. Contact lens with regular glasses |
| d. Western foods with Asia foods | |

6. Recipes

This is a good exercise for the teaching of sequences. (eg. first ,second, next, after that, finally.) Recipes chosen should be simple and easy to follow and ones of which the students are familiar.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. How to make an omelet | d. How to make a grilled sandwich |
| b. How to make a cup of noodles | e. How to make fried rice |
| c. How to make a pizza | f. How to make spaghetti |

7. In-Flight Instructions

Note: I have used the in-flight narration of Korea Airlines. This activity combines gestures with speech and does not require memorization.

- a. Divide students into pairs and have them work together as partners.
- b. One student narrates the script of a flight-attendant giving safety instructions before a flight to passengers while the other student mimes the directions.
- c. Roles are reversed.
- d. If possible this activity should be videotaped and played back for the class to observe and evaluate.

8. Jazz Chants

Jazz chants are always popular with students. The four listed below are among my favorite and can be even be presented as choral readings.

- a. Tall Trees
- b. Rain
- c. Sh! Sh! Baby's Sleeping!
- d. Shoes and Socks

The Jazz Chants can be used for performance with some students acting out the chant while others recite. The results can be quite humorous.

9. Tongue Twisters

Why use tongue twisters? Tongue twisters focus on the repetition of the same consonant or vowel sound and the value of articulation. When to use them? I use them as a warm up at the beginning of class.

Recommended Texts

Harrington, D. & LeBeau, C. (1996). *Speaking of speech*. Macmillan Language House

Baker, A. & Goldstein, S. (1990). *Pronunciation pairs*. Cambridge University Press

LeBeau, C. & Harrington, D. (2002) *Getting ready for speech*. Macmillan Language Solutions, Inc.

Websites:

http://members.tripod.com/jrmeads_515/tipsmar.htm

Tongue Twisters <http://www.uebersetzung.at/twister/>

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/8136/tonguetwisters.html>

Using Newspapers to Reinforce the Four Language Skills

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Introduction

The daily newspaper is a rich source of information which discusses matters of current interest. Unfortunately, many college and university students do not read the papers with any regularity. In a recent informal survey taken among my college students, less than 10 percent used the newspapers as a source of information about domestic and international affairs. In the same survey about fifty percent read the newspaper for less than 20 minutes and over forty percent read a newspaper hardly at all.

In an attempt to interest students in the daily reading of the newspaper I have programmed into my classes a weekly exercise which focuses on the daily newspaper as a motivating force to develop the four language skills.

One of the primary reasons for reading the newspaper is its coverage of current events. These are combined with a vivid use of photos and varied format which help promote discussion. In addition, newspapers are easy to access and the materials are not expensive.

A typical newspaper features a wide range of articles and columns which can be adapted for class use; letters to the editor, crossword puzzles, weather grids, charts, advice columns, editorials, advertisements, theater reviews, want ads, horoscopes and film reviews. Each week there are feature articles on science, medicine, food and international politics. The wealth of information is exhausting but can never be exhausted.

General Preliminary Procedure:

My purpose in using the newspaper in my classroom is to encourage discussion among my students in current events both international and domestic. To do this I follow a preliminary preparatory procedure. First I save the newspapers over the past week and cut out articles and pictures which I would consider to be suitable for student interest. I have found that fifteen pictured article are sufficient for a ninety minute class. I separate the pictures from the articles and further separate the headlines from the articles and captions.

I then proceed to make two collages; one with only pictures and the other with only headlines. The articles I keep separate in an envelope. Finally, I create a worksheet for notes and student

response. This can be time-consuming and it usually requires about three hours cutting, pasting and assembling the collages. However, once the materials have been created they can be used for a variety of classes from creative writing to group discussion.

Classroom Procedure:

Within the classroom I divide the students into groups of two or three. (In this activity students can also work independently). I first distribute the prepared collages with pictures and headlines. I give my students a period of silent work which lasts about twenty minutes. During this time the students match the headlines to the pictures. To make this activity challenging I often include pictures which have no headlines and headlines which have no pictures. After sufficient time has been allotted for this activity students discuss the materials in their respective small group.

Discussion Worksheets:

After the students have joined headlines to pictures an evaluation sheet is distributed to each group and they are assigned a task to evaluate the importance of the news. The purpose of this activity is to foster critical thinking in the students. Here are some examples of the questions found on such a worksheet.

- a. Which was the most important international news of the week?
- b. Which was the least important international news of the week?
- c. Which was the most important domestic news of the week?
- d. Which news stories were optimistic?
- e. Which news stories were pessimistic?
- f. Which new idioms and vocabulary words did you learn from the headlines?

Additional Activities:

Below are additional activities which can be used with newspapers in the classroom.

- a. Use Headlines and eliminate the main verb. Have students guess the missing verb from the context.
- b. Use the headlines and ask students to rewrite them into full sentences.
- c. Cut out quotes from the news and match them with the people who said them.
- d. Cut out headlines from a newspaper written in their native language and ask the students to translate then into English
- e. Make a tape of a news story (either audio or video) from TV and read about the same incident in the newspaper. Compare them. How are they similar? How are they different? What's the difference between TV news and the newspapers.

- f. Have students read an article written in their native language from their local newspaper. Then find the same article in an English Language newspaper and compare.
- g. Make a list of acronyms which appear in a newspaper and discover their meanings. Note: An acronym is a short word which is made from the first letters of a group of words: TEFL is an acronym for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. (e.g. BOJ, HQ, NATO, UNESCO, NASA)
- h. Take a cartoon strip (about four pictures) and white out the bubbles. Have the students fill in their own story OR give them the words of the bubbles in non-sequenced order and have them fill in the cartoon.

Useful websites for news information:

1. National Public Radio - www.npr.org
2. Voice of America - www.voanews.com
3. AJR Newslinks - www.ajrnews.com
4. The Drudge Report - www.drudgereport.com