

Marketing English Education to Japanese Junior High School Students

Margo Kandelman

During a typical Sunday evening of watching "Genki Television", I counted five commercial breaks. Each advertisement explained its product using some English: 1) Start the day with Florida grapefruits; 2) QUEST lipstick in 70 colors; 3) Regain Vitamin Drink; 4) American popcorn; 5) "We love NEW JOG" motorscooters.

On Monday morning I asked my first, second and third year junior high school classes, "Do you like 'Genki Television'?" More than 75% raised their hands. Obviously advertisers have successfully invested much time and money researching:

- ‡ WHO watches "Genki Television"? [12 - 14 age - group];
- ‡ WHAT technique appeals to viewers? [English usage];
- ‡ WHERE will the product be used? [everyday];
- ‡ WHEN will the viewer be watching TV? [Sunday night holiday];
- ‡ WHY will the viewer buy the product? [international appeal].

What does "Genki Television" have to do with English education in Ashikaga's eleven junior high schools? The answer is obvious. Since the market-system approach to human behavior is proven effective, then I wanted to approach being an Assistant English Teacher [AET] in the same fashion. Therefore, I had to determine:

- (I) my target - market audience;
- (II) what special quality I can offer;
- (III) a creative presentation;
- (IV) cultural technique;
- (V) spill - over effect.

This essay will discuss these five areas of marketing English education to Japanese junior high school students.

I. TARGET - MARKET AUDIENCE

As an American AET "team-teaching" English with a Japanese Teacher of English [JTE], we must work together to educate junior high students. Their ages range from 12 - 14 years old. The older the student, the more pressure he feels to pass the high school examination. Since English is one of five tested compulsory subjects (along with Japanese, mathematics, science and social studies), the enjoyment in studying English decreases with age. The student are trying to balance excelling at academics and participating in mandatory club activities, while facing the universal challenge of "growing up". Therefore, I am responsible to motivate the students to enjoy active communication.

All of my classes are cheerful and responsive to "team-teaching". The students are very interested in watching and listening to the AET and JTE communicate in English. This is proven in the "1988 Ashikaga Board of Education Survey to First-Year Junior High School Students". The question, "What do you think is fashionable, trendy?" was answered:

- ‡ 45% to speak a foreign language ;
- ‡ 33% to be proud of chosen profession ;
- ‡ 28% to make a trip to foreign countries
(earning the money yourself, not given from parents) ;
- ‡ 28% to work hard and do your best.

Thus, the interaction between the AET and JTE encourages English education as positive reinforcement role-models.

II.SPECIAL QUALITIES

As a native English speaker, I want to demonstrate the communicative purpose in studying English. For example, during a lesson on map directions, I explained a real situation at Ueno Station where I asked two students : 1) the cost of a train ticket to Asakusa ; and 2) the gate number. They were able to answer my questions and help me catch my train. Communication is the key to language education.

Students are very perceptive. They are able to sense both positive and negative communication. In order to understand foreign language interaction, their senses become more keen to gestures, facial expressions and body language. Everyday we use these three components as effective communicators. By emphasizing them in class, the students will become more aware of their importance in communication.

To help ease anxieties of the up - coming class, it is important that the AET and JTE discuss the goals and implementation of the lesson. Also, casual conversation between the AET and JTE will help identify each others' interests and strong points. If the AET and JTE are excited about the class, then the students will feel confident to speak English.

III. CREATIVE PRESENTATION

Since Japanese education curriculum is the same throughout the country, as administered through MOMBUSHO·· the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, then I must teach within this framework. The "New Crown English" textbook and the JTE's tape recorder are the standard mediums for transmitting English curriculum. Therefore, the AET's visit can offer a creative approach to the daily routine.

First impressions have the strongest impact. I must present myself to catch the junior high students' attention. Since I am marketing my native language, the students must see that I enjoy using this product. Hopefully, each student will form a positive first impression and listen to their peers' reactions. Then, they will "jump on the bandwagon" !

Since I am happy living and working in Ashikaga, it is natural for me to be cheerful. The students enjoy learning in a pleasant environment. I package myself with bright colored, fashionable clothes. Smiling and eye contact creates a relaxed image. After listening to the students casual reactions to the lesson, I found that visual appeal encourages association and usage of the English language.

IV. CULTURAL TECHNIQUE

Within the lesson it is important to show comparisons between American and Japanese culture. The AET and JTE can equally contribute this additional dimension to the lesson. We use self - introduction materials as a beneficial "team - teaching" technique. By utilizing maps, postcards and photographs about America, the students can see part of the world which speaks the language that they are studying.

The AET and JTE can create dialogues which use cultural examples to "team - teach" my self - introduction. For example,

AET : In America, a student can get a driver's license at age 16.

[Drives around the room with an imaginary steering wheel]

JTE : In Japan, a student can drive a motorbike at age 16.

[Vrooms down the aisles of desks]

AET : {asks student} What age can you drive a car?

Student : At age 18.

Another "rah - rah" exchange for the grammar pattern "I have a ...":

JTE : Do you have a dog?

AET : No. I do not. In America, dogs cry "Ruff, ruff."

[loud barking sounds]

AET : {to student} Do you have a dog?

Student : Yes I do.

JTE : In Japan, how do dogs cry?

Student : "Won, won." [loud barks]

These routines may seem silly ; however they are effective "team - teaching" techniques because they :

1. show relaxed interaction between AET and JTE ;
2. introduce the lesson plan with a cultural perspective ;
3. share information about a foreign culture ;
4. motivate the students to communicate with native speakers ;
5. develop their interests to travel and make friends abroad.

Cultural comparisons are interesting to the students, whether it be acting out the cultural definition of new vocabulary words or explaining that American students do not wear British uniforms or have crew cuts. These trivia - anecdotes show the practical relevance of learning English as a "living language".

V. SPILL - OVER EFFECT

Upon the onset of my visit to the junior high school, I emphasize the theme of "friendship through communication." I begin my day giving a brief greeting in the teachers' room, where all the first, second and third year teachers and administrators have their desks. The teachers visit each homeroom class; therefore, if the teachers feel comfortable around me, then this positive impression will spill-over to the students. I hope to be an approachable friendly addition to their school.

Since the students are always walking in and out of the teachers' room getting help on assignments; listening to directions to clean the school; or warming up by the kerosene heater it is important for them to see the other teachers talking with me in English. They admire when the kocho and kyoto-sensei (principal and assistant principal) interact with me in and out of class. They are amazed when the judo teacher and other non-English teachers communicate with me. Also, the other teachers begin to feel confident to speak with me when they follow the role-models of their contemporaries.

Other than coaching students for speech contests; making English listening examination tapes; or attending English Speaking Society Club, I also participate in non-English activities: I eat school lunch with a science homeroom; I play baseball with the boys, and volleyball with the girls during recess; I attend sports festival (undokai); and I listen to choral competition practice. By being a visual part of the school's dynamics, the students and teachers become more relaxed with me reinforcing "friendship through communication."

I try to convey the message that "It's OK to make mistakes. Just do your best. GANBATTE-kudasai." For example, I will participate with students in English to Japanese vocabulary relays. I sit in an empty desk and join in the competition. If I do not know the Japanese meaning of the word, then I will ask a student to help me, since group-consultation is acceptable in class. Thus, the students can see from my role-model that it is natural to make mistakes, and that we will help each other. After all, practice makes perfect.

I also use "emotional appeal" to express "friendship through communication." I will always remember explaining my opinion about the World War I I text reading to third - year students. I proceeded :

"I do NOT like this story. War is BAD.
I wish that America did not bomb Japan,
but Japan bombed America FIRST.
The war happened because the Japanese did not
understand the American mind, and
the Americans did not understand the Japanese mind.

The examination can NOT speak, 'Hello. I want to be your friend.' I think the reason to study English is to make FRIENDS so there will be PEACE."

The entire class experienced the emotional impact of communicating from the heart.

Finally, after each lesson, I present the class with a colorful GROUP AWARD: "Keep up the GOOD work" ; "GREAT job!" ; "SUPER Students". I commend them on their listening and speaking abilities. This positive reinforcement gives them confidence. Everyday can they look on their bulletin board and remember their American friend and the purpose to study and speak English.

CONCLUSION

In marketing English education to Japanese junior high school students, I assume the role of a cultural ambassador. My visit is a chance to communicate in English with a native speaker. It is also a opportunity to learn about each other's cultures. Most of all, it is a time to form international friendship.

English communication does not stop after English class. The lesson must motivate the students to enjoy speaking English. The AET and JTE must make an interesting "team - teaching" presentation to captivate the students attention.

The AET's first visit makes the strongest impression. It is like "consumer voting in the market - place" .. choosing whether to purchase a product. The students are deciding whether to :

- 1) enjoy learning English for the purpose of friendly communication ; OR
- 2) fear studying English in order to pass the required examination.

Therefore, it is essential to make a creative presentation and give an "emotional appeal" targeted to the minds of junior high students. Then, I gather my energy to "team - teach" the way I would have liked to have been taught when I was learning a foreign language.

Since I interact with the Ashikaga community in my daily life. I have learned about the impressions that the Japanese have towards foreign cultures. I have found that the Japanese are very interested in American trends. Japanese television portrays a typical Japanese family with Western amenities : Audis : polo : pasta ; and permed hair. This is comperable to the "Cosby Show" in America. Both cultures are aspiring to be consumed in leisure activities. Therefore, the English language can be the Japanese junior high student's ticket to experience the Western world.