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## Research Digest

# A Job Interview Task-Based Unit: Employing the PACE Inductive Grammar Approach

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This article demonstrates how to embed grammar instruction within a task-based language teaching (TBLT) thematic unit designed for Japanese college English classes using the PACE Model. PACE is a four-step approach in which students comprehend authentic texts, derive highlighted grammar patterns inductively with teacher guidance, and use the grammar in communicative tasks. This approach is compatible with current national standards for foreign language teaching in Japan. These standards call for developing communicative ability through student-centered instruction using materials based on actual language use in which grammar plays a supporting role in communication.

本論は、日本の大学における英語教育のために、タスクに基づく言語指導法 (Task-Based Language Teaching/TBLT) の課題学習ユニットにPACEモデルを用いた文法指導を組み入れる方法を提示する。4ステップからなるPACEアプローチを通して、学習者は真の英文テキストを理解し、教師の指導の下で、ハイライトされた文法パターンを帰納的に引き出し、それをコミュニケーションの中で実際に使用する。このアプローチは、コミュニケーションにおいて文法が補助的な役割を果たしている現実的な外国語運用に基づく教材を用いて、学習者中心の指導法によりコミュニケーション能力の発達を図る、現在の日本における外国語教授法の基準に適合している。

Improving communicative competence, in which grammar plays a supporting role, is paramount in national standards for English education in Japan. Yet existing

pedagogical practices, chiefly lecture-based explicit grammar instruction, remain largely ineffective. Chujo, Yokota, Hasegawa, and Nishigaki (2012) documented the English proficiency level of incoming freshmen at a private university in Japan. The students failed to answer 55% of questions on high school-level grammar and 27% of questions on junior high school-level grammar. This means that university educators are faced with the daunting task of re-teaching basic grammar concepts to incoming students.

Traditional grammar-fronted deductive methods dominate English language education at both the primary and secondary levels in the Japanese public school system. Recently, the Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT, 2011a, 2011b) has mandated classrooms adopt instruction that is more student-centered. Yet despite sustained policy guidance from MEXT, communicative approaches have not replaced traditional grammar-first methods (Humphries & Burns, 2015; Nishino, 2011; Tahira, 2012). These traditional methods isolate the form of language, giving little to no attention to communicative function. MEXT has sought to increase L2 input by requiring teachers to instruct solely in the target language (MEXT, 2011b). However, this denies students and teachers the use of L1 as a vital resource for exploring L2 grammar concepts.

Years of passive learning in junior high school and high school has been detrimental to developing communicative competence (Hino, 1988). Once these learners enter university, teachers face the burden of designing grammar instruction that addresses deficiencies in the students' productive abilities while maintaining communication as the core purpose for language use. We suggest that tertiary-level English classes in Japan can benefit from an empirically-supported pedagogical approach that embeds grammar instruction within themed communicative tasks. This paper presents a unit based on US job interviews that blends form and function within a meaningful context, while providing students with a fresh take on grammar exploration.

## **Task-Based Language Teaching**

Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to a broad range of meaning-based and student-centered approaches (see Richards & Rodgers, 2001 for

a review). Within CLT, *focus on form* (Long, 2000) is a way of providing contextualized grammar instruction, which can enhance language learning (Ellis, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 1990). Lee and VanPatten (2003) review several studies examining the outcomes of communicative instruction that highlights grammar to facilitate comprehension. Across a variety of foreign languages, they found that this specific attention to grammar during CLT instruction was more effective in promoting acquisition when compared to learner control groups receiving traditional CLT instruction.

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is one CLT approach that, in contrast to traditional structural syllabuses, utilizes communicative tasks based on real-world situations as the core unit of instruction (Van den Branden, 2012). Learners focus on meaning while actively working towards concrete goals (Nunan, 1989). Well-designed tasks create a real need for communicative language use (Frost, 2004).

Communication and collaboration during tasks creates opportunities for scaffolded learning between teacher and learner, or learner-to-learner. The student-centered nature of TBLT affords a high degree of individualization, providing opportunities for learners to notice gaps in their knowledge (Gass, 1997; Schmidt, 1990; Schmidt & Frota, 1986), negotiate meaning (Hatch, 1978), stretch their abilities through modified output (Swain, 1985), receive individualized feedback (Ellis, 1994; Nassaji & Swain 2000), and collaboratively construct knowledge (Swain, 2000). Within TBLT, *focus on form* purposefully draws learners' attention to linguistic features during tasks (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Butler (2016) reviews the obstacles to implementation of TBLT in East Asia, such as teacher misconceptions, lack of training opportunities and support, and improper implementation in ways that do not significantly differ from traditional approaches. One major challenge to implementing TBLT in East Asia is finding ways to include a greater focus on teaching grammar in a meaning-based approach (Carless, 2007). In a semester-long study of student perceptions of TBLT at a university in Korea, Kim, Jung, and Tracy-Ventura (2017) reported on an array of evolving student perceptions about a task-based course, implying

that learners can successfully adapt to the approach. However, one common student criticism throughout the course was that the link between the tasks and grammar practice was not clear. The PACE model provides a means to integrate *focus on form* into task-based language teaching.

## PACE Model

Donato and Adair-Hauck (1994) first introduced the PACE model, an inductive model for teaching grammar in the classroom. This model takes advantage of key principles within sociocultural theory (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015), which proposes that learning is a mediated process which requires learners to take an active part in the development and restructuring of their linguistic system.

In the PACE procedure, the learners are first *presented* (P) with an authentic text (visual or written) as a whole piece in its intended native-to-native context. This allows learners to attend to meaning, accessing the appropriate schema needed for comprehension. Next, students' *attention* (A) is drawn to a specific grammar form within the text. Since the learners have already addressed the meaning of the text, the learners' language processing load will be lighter, freeing them to focus on the grammar in context. Then, in a dialog with the teacher and their classmates, the learners *co-construct* (C) the meaning of the grammar form and see how it fits into a meaningful context. Students are encouraged to externalize their thought processes to clarify potential misunderstandings about the function of the grammar form. In the final step of the PACE sequence, the learners will do an *extension* (E) activity to apply the grammar concept they have been examining. This could come in the form of role play, interviews, and other activities.

The crucial aspect of the PACE model is that an authentic oral or written story be presented in its complete form. Donato, Adair-Hauck, and Cumo-Johanssen (2005) assert that "the whole is always viewed as being greater than the sum of its parts and it is the whole that gives meaning to the parts. In terms of grammar instruction, words, phrases, or sentences are not linguistic islands unto themselves" (p. 193). The authors advise that the selected material should clearly demonstrate the grammar pattern to be highlighted.

There are numerous benefits when students take an active role in grammar instruction, engaging in conversations about the how and why of grammar patterns in authentic situations (Table 1).

The PACE model has been used in studies evaluating inductive and deductive teaching methods. Haight, Herron, and Cole (2007) conducted a study involving 47 French FL university students learning through both deductive and inductive approaches to grammar instruction. In the lessons taught using the deductive method, students were presented with a grammar rule and then several examples demonstrating the pattern followed by choral reading.

In the lessons using the inductive PACE model approach, the students

Table 1

*Comparison of the PACE Model and Traditional Explicit Approach*

Traditional/Explicit Approach	PACE Model/Guided Participation Approach
1. Sequencing of tasks from simple to complex	1. Complex language use before moving to procedural skills
2. Minimal teacher/learner interaction; teacher-directed explanation	2. Instructional interaction between teacher (“expert”) and learners (“novices”)
3. Explicit explanation of grammar	3. Richly implicit explanation (guided participation)
4. Learner must master each step before going to next step (competence before performance)	4. Encourages performance before competence (approximations encouraged)
5. Learners are passive and rarely participate in constructing the explanation	5. Learners participate in the problem-solving process and higher-order thinking skills (opportunity for learners’ actions to be made meaningful)
6. Few questions—mainly rhetorical	6. Language and especially questions must be suitably tuned to a level at which performance requires assistance
7. The functional significance of a grammatical point often does not emerge until end of lesson	7. Lesson operationalizes functional significance of grammatical structure before mechanical procedures take place

(Adapted from Adair-Hauck, Donato & Cumo-Johanssen, 2005, p. 201)

were first exposed to the grammar pattern in the context of authentic use, and then asked to examine similar sentences to highlight grammar patterns such as partitives for plural/singular and masculine/feminine nouns (e.g. *le, la, les*, etc.). Next, students followed a series of guided questions related to the proposed grammar pattern without the instructor explicitly describing the rule. The teacher and students then constructed the grammar rule collectively.

These two teaching methods (i.e., inductive and deductive) were used in alternation and evaluated throughout the course of the semester. The data showed that guided inductive grammar instruction utilizing the PACE model yielded higher gains in grammar development in intermediate and long-term post-tests versus explicit grammar instruction. The researchers suggest that beginning foreign language students might achieve longer-term retention of grammar structures when “the instructor and the learner construct an understanding of a linguistic structure together through a series of student-instructor interactions” (Haight et al., 2007, p. 293).

This research was replicated with intermediate learners (Vogel, Herron, Cole, & York, 2011). The researchers administered 10 new grammatical structures fit to intermediate learners of French. They also added an assessment of learner preferences between deductive and inductive approaches to learning grammar. The results showed greater gains for the inductive approach in short-term testing despite the fact that students reported preferring the deductive approach. Delayed post-testing indicated long-term retention between inductive and deductive grammar instruction was not statistically significant. In Dotson (2010), another study modeled after Haight et al. (2007), advanced French learners demonstrated greater long-term gains when using the PACE model with guided inductive questions. The learners in this study also preferred a deductive approach.

## **Instructional Design and Grammar Pattern**

This section outlines how the PACE model can be adapted to Japanese university EFL classes to fit the situation-specific developmental needs of its learners. The theme of the unit is how to apply and interview for jobs requiring English-speaking

ability in Japan. This TBLT unit spans six 100-minute classes (Appendix). The unit culminates in a mock interview with an English-speaking guest interviewer in the last class.

In the authors' experiences, students entering university struggle with subordinating conjunctions (subordinators) in both written and spoken discourse. Japanese rhetorical structure allows for subordinators to exist in separate sentences, which can thus create fragmented clauses. In our thematic unit, students need to master the concept of causality in order to properly support statements they make about their experience and character within the context of a job interview.

Observed student output, both spoken and written, shows evidence that students understand that "because" is a subordinator but fail to recognize that the grammar form links a dependent with an independent clause.

Written examples:

1. I think people these days are living longer. Because medical technology is more advanced.
2. Sushi is delicious. Because fresh, healthy, and has many variety.

Spoken examples:

Teacher: "Why are soba noodles better than ramen noodles?"

Student: "Because it's healthy."

Teacher: "Do you like McDonalds' hamburgers?"

Student: "Because it's delicious."

While the oral production of "because" in English allows for the speaker to omit restating the question in their reply, the students in these examples have consciously or subconsciously marked the function as transferable from their L1 (Kellerman, 1985). This could make responses to questions during formal interview situations seem blunt and oversimplified. The communicative value (VanPatten, 1985) of the form "because" has the characteristics of [-semantic value, + redundancy]. Students often see the grammar pattern "because," but it has little semantic value in and of itself when compared to other nouns and verbs in the text they are reading. The conjunction *naze nara* (なぜなら) is frequently used in Japanese but the function differs from the L2 usage. The Japanese

conjunction does not link intra-sentence dependent and independent clauses as seen in the following example:

今日は学校を休校にすべきではないのか？なぜならインフルエンザでたくさんの生徒は学校を休んでいる

Without specific attention being drawn to L1-L2 usage differences, the form-meaning for *naze nara* has been incorrectly transferred to the English subordinator “because.”

## Instructional Sequence

### P. Presentation

The sequence begins with three viewings of a video created by and for U.S. high school graduates interviewing for highly competitive internships. The Japanese students explore the dos and don'ts of American-style interviews. The participants in the video repeatedly use the targeted grammar form “because.” How **P** functions in the whole TBLT unit can be seen in the Appendix.

### A. Attention

Attention is drawn to the causality of the grammar pattern “because” within the context of the TBLT theme. In the first of two activities, students read model responses to the question, “Why were you fired from work?” and determine if the reasons provided have logical cohesion when using the conjunction “because”; one incorrect example being, “I was fired from work *because* I was always on time.” A second activity highlighting “because” can be seen in the Appendix.

### C. Co-construction

The co-construction phase of the PACE model prescribes an improvised conversation. However, we suggest several questions below as a template to initiate dialog between teacher and students about the grammar pattern “because.” Additional conversation in this phase is encouraged.

In small groups, students write down and then collectively share their hypotheses following the teacher's guiding questions: “What word goes in the blanks? Do the sentences start with *because*? What words do the sentences start with? What is the pattern for sentences that use *because*?” Group collaboration



helps students to work out a pattern such as: (paraphrase interviewer's question) + (*because*) + (reason).

### **E. Extension**

Next, students complete the writing activity, "Why are you a good friend?," responding by using the target grammar structure "because." For homework, students interview various teachers to ascertain their character strengths (see Appendix for instructions). The information collected from students' writings is recycled into responses for use in the final day mock interview.

## **Discussion**

The PACE model, when incorporated into a TBLT approach, offers an alternative to a simple choice between traditional grammar instruction or purely communicative approaches. It should be noted that within the PACE model, Adair-Hauck, Donato, and Cumo-Johanssen (2005) caution that grammar discussion in L2 is advisable, so long as the concepts and language used are level-appropriate for the learners. When L1 is used, word-for-word translations should be avoided. The purpose of co-construction is not to test students' grammatical knowledge, but rather to help students explore and reflect on what they have comprehended in the target language (Adair-Hauck, Donato, & Cumo-Johanssen, 2005).

The co-construction phase requires modeling and scaffolding until learners can take increasing amounts of responsibility over these constructive dialogs. Based on student feedback from our post-unit surveys as well as other PACE model studies, students might need time to acclimate to this *interactive* approach to learning grammar. Students not accustomed to the struggle of inductive learning need to be conditioned over time to the expectation that they will take an active part in the learning process.

## **Conclusion**

The PACE model represents active learning in its purest form. In the co-construction phase, students with similar grammar misunderstandings are afforded the opportunity to verbalize their hypotheses on grammar forms with

their classmates. In a traditional deductive method, there is an over-reliance on the saliency of the explanation provided by teachers and textbook makers. If such an explanation fails to promote learner growth, the teacher is usually left with either one-on-one tutoring after class or leaving confused students to their own devices.

Language is not meaningful when presented in decontextualized form, as is often the case in structural syllabi. The PACE model starts with whole texts that are both interesting and relevant. Learners are then primed to investigate the form-function relationship of the highlighted grammar patterns. Embedding this inductive grammar approach within a TBLT theme-based unit, such as the above-stated job interview, affords learners more meaning-based interactions through collaboration and negotiation. In a TBLT-PACE model, the grammar point services the communicative goal while recycling the grammar structure from authentic materials.

Teachers need approaches that move beyond the dichotomy between CLT and traditional grammar instruction to those that allow students to drive language learning. The PACE model liberates teachers from serving as an oracle of grammatical knowledge by allowing the text to provide all the necessary clues needed to promote language growth. By re-contextualizing instruction within the target language itself, teachers are then free to be a co-explorer, awareness-raiser, and motivator.

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## **Appendix**

### **Job Interview Unit Daily Outline & PACE Sequence**

#### **Day 1: “How to Apply for a Job”**

Student background knowledge will be activated by talking about and ranking part-time jobs. The teacher will introduce the unit. The main activity for the day’s lesson will be working with a job application document from the U.S. Students will focus on understanding the overall meaning, write down any questions about vocabulary, and note things that stood out. As a homework assignment, students will “culturally” translate a list of common English expressions whose literal meanings differ from the pragmatic ones.

#### **Day 2: “Interview Dos and Don’ts”**

In the first step of the **PACE** sequence, “presentation,” students will explore the dos and don’ts of U.S. interviews through an authentic video created by-and-for U.S. youths seeking advice on how to successfully apply for an internship at a law firm.

In the pre-task, students view screenshots sourced from the video and predict the interviewee’s mistakes using a list of key phrases. Students check their answers while viewing the first part of the video. Students watch the second part of the video and examine key words and phrases from an ideal applicant. They review their earlier ideas about what a person *should* do in a U.S. job interview. Next, students will re-watch the video while putting the interviewer’s questions in order, and then later review jargon, vocabulary, and phrases.

Following the video activity, students will use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast customs and behaviors in United States and Japanese job interviews. For journal homework, students will write two sentences about each habit/custom in a Japanese interview that would be a “bad fit” for a job interview in the U.S. by sourcing ideas from their Venn diagram.

#### **Day 3: Preparing for an Interview “Why Are You a Good Fit for This Job?”**

Students will watch an authentic video from the U.S. that gives advice on how to answer the top 10 commonly asked interview questions and complete a cloze

activity. Following this activity, students will go through the Attention, Co-construct, and Extension phases of the PACE sequence. Attention is drawn to the grammar construct “because” first through logical cohesion and in a multiple-choice activity titled “*I’m a good fit at 7-Eleven because...*”. Students match model sentences of interviewee responses with several character traits that are typical of an ideal employee (e.g., honest, hard-working, polite). The students are provided with model answers such as, *I think I’m a good fit for working at 7-Eleven because even if something bad happens, I always try to smile.*

Next, in the Co-construct phase, the following question is written on the board as a prompt: “Why do you think you would be a good fit at 7-Eleven?” Then, the instructor writes three sentences on the board.

I think I’m a good fit for working at 7-Eleven \_\_\_\_\_ I’m never late for class.

I think I’m a good fit for working at 7-Eleven \_\_\_\_\_ I like talking with people.

I think I’m a good fit for working at 7-Eleven \_\_\_\_\_ I try many times until I can do something.

In groups, students collaborate to fill in the blanks with “because,” then analyze the usage of the conjunction within the context of job interviews. Answers are shared and discussed as a class.

Two Extension activities are given to meaningfully apply “because.” First, students write sentences that answer the prompt “What makes you a good friend?” Students are required to use the grammar structure in their answers (ex. “*I think I am a good friend because I listen to my friends when they have a problem*”).

For the second Extension activity, entitled “What makes me a good student?”, students interview three teachers, asking them to provide feedback on their character strengths. Learners are then required to use the grammar pattern “because” and use their teachers’ reasons for support to compose a short speech about themselves.



#### **Day 4: “Interview Activity”**

From teacher interviews, students will develop an “elevator speech”—a short persuasive speech. In the latter half of the session, students will have the opportunity to perform their speeches and get feedback from classmates.

#### **Day 5: “Performance Assessment”**

Students will complete a performance assessment demonstrating their knowledge of interviews in the U.S. through role play. Based on teacher and student comments, students refine their answers for the summative task of the unit.

#### **Day 6: “Interview with Guest Panel of Employers”**

A panel of English-speaking Japanese judges will conduct an interview with each student and provide feedback based on their personal experiences both interviewing for jobs in English and using English in the workplace. Afterwards, students will complete a writing prompt and give feedback on the unit.