Project Ibunka:
An International Collaborative Online Project

Masahito Watanabe*, Naoko Kasami**, Nam-Sook Chung***, Su-hsun Tsai****

*University Education Center
Yokohama National University, 79-1 Tokiwadai, Hodogaya, Yokohama 240-8501, Japan
wata33@ynu.ac.jp
** Institute for Language Education Research and Development,
J. F. Oberlin University, 3758 Tokiwa-machi, Machida-shi, Tokyo 194-0294, Japan
naoko.kasmi@gmail.com
***Department English Language Education
Hanyang University, The College of Education B/D 17 Haengdang-Dong, Sungdong-Gu, Seoul 133-792
Rep. of Korea, sshsm2@hanyang.ac.kr
**** Department of English Instruction
Taipei Municipal University of Education, 2F, 3, Lane 5, Xi-Zhou Street, Taipei 116, Taiwan, ROC
teemshtkimo@yahoo.com.tw

"Ibunka" means "different cultures" in Japanese. Project Ibunka aims to organize a cross-cultural exchange on the Internet among students with various cultural backgrounds. The interaction is carried out only in English. It starts in October and ends in December every year. Since 2000, more than 2,400 students from seventeen different countries have joined it. In Project Ibunka 2007, 459 students from eight different countries made about 2,704 postings. Most of the teachers who join the project are the repeaters. They send their students to the project almost every year. The strong partnership among teachers has always been the key to this success. In this symposium, project partner teachers from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, are the panelists. All of them have been engaged in the project for more than four years. In the symposium, Mr. Masahito Watanabe makes an overview of the project, Ms. Naoko Kasami, a motivational analysis of the project, Ms. Nam-Sook Chung, a comparative study of students’ corpora obtained from the project, and Ms. Su-hsun, Tsai, a quantitative research of Taiwanese students’ English vocabulary.

1. What is Project Ibunka, an Overview
(Masahito Watanabe, Japan)

`Project Ibunka’ is a cross-cultural exchange projects on the Internet. Since 2000, more than 2,400 students from seventeen different countries have joined it. ‘Ibunka’ means different cultures in Japanese. Students from various countries with different cultural background meet and exchange their views on a specially designed website.

Project Ibunka has three main activities, 1) text-based bulletin board discussion, 2) chat sessions, and 3) video letter exchange. Among them, the bulletin board discussion is the biggest one. It consists of three main themes, 1) school life, 2) cultures, and 3) social issues – world peace. Each theme has a number of sub-themes so that students can choose any topic they like. On the other hand, partner teachers supervise students’ postings and interaction. The database management tools that the web-site offers help this. They pick up most excellent postings of the week and put them on the weekly newsletters.

Project Ibunka does not aim to replace a locally organized face-to-face course with a full-featured online course where everything is processed online. Rather, the project itself constitutes only some part of an existing course. It is totally up to partner teachers to decide how they integrate the project into the curriculum, how often and how much students should make contribution, and how the learning output from the project should be evaluated.

In fact, partner schools can participate in the project with different objectives. For example, in the previous projects, partner schools have joined the project in order to push their students to improve writing skills, to understand different cultures, to use the project as a self-learning tool for communication, to enhance computer literacy, etc. They should take the responsibility for their students, but they do not have to take much responsibility to augment the learning of other partner students.

This type of loose e-moderation contributes to attain the cultural variability of the participants. However, this can also be one of the weak points.
2. Motivating Japanese Students to Learn English and Cultures through Project Ibunka (Naoko Kasami, Japan)

2.1 Introduction
Motivating students to learn English is one of the challenging tasks in university education. Most students do not have opportunities to communicate in English in their daily life. In order to expose Japanese students to English and other cultures, 19 students of junior college in Japan participated in BBS-based intercultural exchange project, ‘Ibunka’ in the class of Internet English in 2005. The project was looked into in the light of ARCS Model of Motivational Design, and the author indicates what to do for the future improvement and for enhancing students’ motivation to learn.

2.2 ARCS Model and the result of analysis
Keller (1983)’s ARCS Model of Motivational Design is well-known as a model for an instructional design. According to this model, there are four essential elements to be considered for motivating students to learn: attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction.

2.3 Questionnaires based on ARCS Model
At the end of the Project Ibunka, a questionnaire was conducted to check whether the project enhanced students’ internal motivation based on 4 elements of the ARCS Model (n=18).

2.4 The number of posted messages
The posted messages by Japanese students gradually became unique and interesting to attract readers’ concerns. However, the number of the average of posted messages was only three. There are few students who replied to partner students.

Table 1. The number of messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Posted messages</th>
<th>Received messages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to enhance proactive interaction among students, it would be useful to set the minimum number to reply, and which is linked to a student’s grade. If writing replies has relevance to the grade, students will write more replies and it will promote exchanges, and there will be more possibilities for students to get replies, and it finally leads to more confidence and satisfaction from the project.

2.4 Conclusion
Thorough the collaborative learning, many Japanese students were motivated to learn English and cultures. For further improvement, the author suggests to set the minimum number of reply.

3. Vocabulary Analysis of Learner Corpora in International E-pal projects (Nam-Sook Chung, Korea)

3.1 Introduction
The purpose of this corpus-based study is to describe how vocabulary frequencies differ among the distinct language groups’ learners who took part in Project Ibunka from the years 2001 to 2007.

3.2 Literature Review
Conrad (2000) argued that corpus linguistics can radically change grammar teaching in the 21st century. Ringbom (1998) found that L1 transfer and its universal features have important effects on learning a foreign language.

3.3 Method
Range GSL program and WordSmith software Tool were used to compare vocabulary of different countries’ texts at the same time.

3.4 Result
(1) What high-frequency words are found in all nationalities?

The most frequent top 12 words among total corpora are all function words such as I, the, to, and, is, in, of, a, you, my, it, and that. This implies that most e-pal students were more conscious of grammar and form than of lexical...
meaning.

(2) How rich a vocabulary do each different country’s learners use in e-pal projects? How much coverage of each different learner corpora of the 12 base lists Range BNC program provides?

Table 1 shows that students from Taiwan, China, the UAE and Germany are the highest users in high-frequency 2000 words. Students from Burkina Faso, Argentina, and Namibia are the highest users in low-frequency words. It implies that they overuse difficult and rare words more than 2,000 words. Namibia, Korea, and the UAE overused academic words.

Table 2. Percentage of vocabulary distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>One &amp; Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2000 words</td>
<td>Academic words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>87.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>89.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>83.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>83.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>85.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>86.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>82.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>83.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Burkina Faso</td>
<td>80.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>84.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>86.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>86.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Namibia</td>
<td>83.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) What is the difference of frequent content verb in each of the distinct four language groups learners, compared with NS corpus?

High-frequency content verbs such as tell, get, go, know, think, see, make and want occur in all learner corpora except for take and come in NS corpus.

4. An Analysis on Vocabulary Size of Students’ Writings in English — The Taiwan Part of Ibunka Project (Su-hsun Tsai, Taiwan)

4.1 Instructions

In Taiwan, the government in charge of education suggests 4,880 words that students have to learn before entering into higher education (MOE, 1995). However, no sufficient studies have been done in the field of authentic context that how many words students have actually performed after six or more years of learning English before entering into colleges. This research focuses on the vocabulary size of English that college students of Taiwan used when they exchanged messages with other students from different countries in Project Ibunka during 2006-2007.

The tool used in this research to compute English vocabulary is CLAN, a program specialized for language analysis developed by CHILDES project (MacWhinney, 2006). All students messages were collected as the research data and vocabulary were further computed by CLAN. The numbers of students joining from Taiwan were 84 and 134 in Year 2006 and 2007.

4.2 Findings and Discussions

The students posted 648 and 666 messages in Year 2006 and 2007, and they wrote up to 90,982 and 84,863 words, average from 127.4 to 140.4 words as shown in Table 3.

If taking all Taiwan students as one group, it is found that they used different words ranging from 5,644 to 5,995 words in Table 4. Frankly speaking, this is a quite big number of vocabulary used by college students. In one way, the students nowadays are more competent in English than those in the past.

However, the researcher also found a possible reason for students’ high vocabulary size because they frequently used an online bilingual dictionary if they encountered difficulty in getting a word from their mind. They might select the word of a wanted part-of-speech, but they seldom took time to check further if the word used was appropriate.

3.5 Conclusion

This study on word frequencies of learner corpora gives insight into grammar and vocabulary teaching and shows the effects of the structure of the L1.
From the data, it was found that students used various vocabulary to express their thoughts in the communication. They are also active in using an online bilingual dictionary as it is very useful and convenient in helping them during their writing process.

However, a further training is necessary to teach students how to refine their vocabulary selection or to advise them not to take the first word without checking.

**References**


