Still Images for Written English Communication (Part 3)
Students' Photographs as a Stimulus for Interaction and Essay Production

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Abstract: Despite the stream of directives about improving students' English communicative ability from the Japanese Education Ministry since 2003 [1-4] significant development has remained elusive. One obstacle to communication (as an individual and a cooperative faculty) is the inflexible "one-size-fits-all" philosophy of commercial textbooks (and thus the pedagogy they entail) which fail to meet students' unique inter-expressive objectives. Accordingly, we examine whether a non-text approach typified by "Dogme" [5] principles can enhance EFL students' ability to communicate in English by asking if Japanese college students' proficiency develops during their spoken and written production when using their own photos, as opposed to the traditional textbook-teaching styles in all their other classes. The 60 students whose production was analyzed had close ability levels in their pre-course language proficiency tests, increasing the validity of the study to monitor development. This study was indicated by the success of the approach in both motivating students and improving their English communication ability over several years of its application, firstly with sophomores studying conversation, and subsequently with first year students learning reading and writing. Many English department students taught by a wide range of experienced text-dependent teachers are disinclined to attend optional conversation classes, and see no development according to anonymous and often frank course-end evaluations. They derive insufficient appeal and motivation to communicate in English using textbooks. The data in this latest consideration was collected over six months starting in early 2014 from two classes' randomly selected language production samples. We analyze data from both classes to assess development by comparing fluency, accuracy and complexity changes in recordings and photo essay interaction questions. Feedback is given in the appendix.
Keywords:
TEFL, Communication, Dogme, Images, Feedback, Active Learning

1. Background

This is the last in a series of papers and presentations from 2011 to 2014 [6-15] examining a textbook alternative to TEFL, using Japanese university students' own photos to facilitate class communication. The prior studies began by considering a general non-text approach as a viable TEFL syllabus before specifying how to use a situational analysis to apply "Dogme" principles to the author's own students. To ascertain if the early motivation apparent in their first experience of this method also gave rise to development in their perceived communicative proficiency, recurring surveys were conducted, and the minutiae of the approach detailed. Subsequently, the full ramifications and potential of the approach were investigated by expanding it to various classes, abilities, time frames and ancillary methodologies. On the strength of the significant student response resulting, the method was then applied to written communication. The approach was modified accordingly, at the same time, pursuing more objective evaluations in terms of its effect on students' linguistic proficiency development by attempting basic analyses of changes in the fluency, accuracy and complexity of both their written and spoken production samples.

2. Challenges of Teaching Spoken English Communication

According to Galantucci [16] 30% of well-educated people have difficulty following spoken language communication even in their mother tongue, often being unable to detect in tests when a conversation they are having with one person switches to a completely unrelated conversation with another. Educators must focus not only on teaching English, but also on innovating global approaches to facilitating communication to teach a more conducive and holistic mentality, building student co-operation by trusting them enough to become independent learners and by respecting the reality that almost all students most want to learn with and about each other, not a textbook, and not the teacher. As teachers, we have vital tasks to perform. Denying interaction opportunities by monopolizing class time with teacher talk or book exercises and their uncertain results are not among them.

3. Overall Structure and Content for Spoken Classes

In a 16-weekly 90-minute year-3 college conversation course, early classes featured video-taped individual self-introduction presentations to give some familiarity with face-to-face target-language communication. In the remaining classes, two students brought their own choice of photos each week for others to ask questions about. Photos related to somewhere they had travelled to in Japan or abroad, but the conversation subject range was unlimited and included content like: driving school; fashion; internship; Japanese Adults Day, and so on, including aspects of both domestic and foreign culture. Interactions began with specifics before expanding to related experiences. Classes were videotaped for review.

4. Spoken Interaction Set Up

After using photos in one class, at the start of each subsequent class students reviewed the previous week's interaction. The more relaxed the students were, the more real the interaction became. Before starting students off on independent interaction, basic aims and advice were given. Once interactions began, the teacher stayed silent to help students become independent speakers and learners, but gestures helped prompt interactions. The teacher gave advice about communication breakdowns at the end of interactions and praised the best points. At the start of round two, new aims that applied thereon were explained.

5. Spoken Question and Answer Analysis

The random samples below point to a clear increase in confidence during the three months of student generated conversations. The following data indicates that development was made between May and July, and this is also confirmed later in the writing analysis, suggesting that using students' own photos has a potentially wide application in skill development.

Accuracy is measured here by comparing the number of errors in samples from early on in the course with later on, while fluency is indicated by the average length of each utterance, and complexity by the increase in the variety of conjunctions used.

5.1. Sample #1

Date: May; Topic: Music; Length: 225 seconds; 11 Sentences: 111 Words: (22 per answer); 16 Errors; 6 Conjunctions; 1 Type. 5 Questions: *Do we have to? Who are they? Is it? How many get? How about you?*

Answer 1: *Yes, the bottom photo (it) is ( ) official T-shirts. It is very popular among these people and we wear our favorite (band) T-shirts.*

Answer 2: *They ( ) my (friend) and we contact (with) Twitter and we first met. He is my best friend and he's from Fukushima. He (make) an opportunity (that) I decided to ( ) the music festival. He's very kind and I like him.*

Answer 3: *Yes, both (date) ( ) the same two (date) the Star Festival, and people write a wish (in) a strip of paper.*

Answer 4: *About thirty thousand.*

Answer 5: *He (get) contact with Twitter three years ago. I ( ) confidence (to) him. He has 4 children.*

5.2. Sample #2

Date: July; Topic: Adult's Day, etc.; Length: 221 seconds; 8 Sentences; 118 Words (23.6 per answer); 5 Errors; 8 Conjunctions; 4 Types; 5 Questions: *How long is? Did you? Can you? Was it? Are you?*

Answer 1: *About 2 hours. This day I woke up 4 a.m. We gathered at 9 a.m., but all ( ) participants came about 10 a.m., so we needed to prepare all, so we needed to come earlier than others.*

Answer 2: *(It) was so nervous because this ceremony was started ( ) my*

announcement so everybody <u>looked</u> at me, but after the celebration my old friends <u>said</u> to me: "It was a good ceremony. Thank you." So this day <u>could</u> be a nice day in my life.

Answer 3: *A horse stable in the back yard.*

Answer 4: *I <u>had</u> never <u>touched</u> ( ) horse-riding horse. It was the first time.*

Answer 5: *Actually ( ) horse instructor (lead) this horse so I can't ride alone.*

Thus, Sample #2 had 60% fewer errors, 5 c.f. 16, and more accurate answers overall:

Table 1 *Indicating answers are longer and more complex*

Sample No.	Words	Verb morphemes
#1 (May)	29.6 per minute	4 types
#2 (July)	32.0 per minute	10 types

6. Comments on Photos for Spoken English Communication

The technique of using photos indicated superiority over regular textbook conversation classes from the perspective of the amount of spoken communication. Between 80% and 90% of the whole class time was used for student-to-student interaction in spontaneous English speech without teacher interjection. Presenting students took it in turn to ask one or the other of the two with photos basic questions to establish the details about the time, place and people shown, etc. This was followed by a second round of questions to broaden the scope for students to ask questions to whichever one in the pair that they did not ask in the first round. During the latter round, questioners could follow any line of questioning that they liked, following up on previous questions, or exploring entirely new areas. This increased interaction complexity and range. The first 10 minutes were used to review the previous class and introduce visible vocabulary in the new photos as an optional basis for students' questions, increasing confidence and assisting acquisition.

7. Challenges of Teaching Written EFL Communication

The components of the class were various, but photo essays were prioritized for inter-student communication. The class took place in a computer room. Students were encouraged to share their knowledge and give encouragement and technical support. Assignments included: self-introductions; high school versus college Golden Weeks; high school memories; and, previous high school summer holidays. With the collaboration made possible by circulating their photos and first drafts, just as with conversation, the students could achieve their highest goal, communicating with each other independently in English. While students expect their writing to be corrected by the teacher, they seemed more motivated to produce clear and meaningful writing by positive peer interaction. Rather than overcorrecting mistakes, the teacher indicated where they occurred for the students to solve.

8. Overall Writing Class Structure and Content

Class numbers were about the same as the conversation class above. The teacher took photos of the class to print out for students to circle their face and add self-introductions. These were circulated for others to read and make informal comments ("Me too!" "For example?" "Tell me more" plus optional questions) then returned for students to rewrite and complete Photo essay 1. The monthly photo-essay writing process was as follows:

8.1. Week 1

Write a short introduction to your photo.

Form 2 groups.

Circulate the photos and paragraphs.

Write questions and return papers.

Mail the first draft to the teacher.

8.2. Week 2

Check the teacher's reply.

Rewrite the paragraph.

Expand the subject. (E.g. compare this Golden Week and last year's)

Mail the second draft to the teacher.

8.3. Week 3

Check the teacher's reply.

Rewrite and expand the subject. (E.g. what Golden Week means in Japan)

Write a conclusion. (E.g. which is better, last year or this year)

Mail the fourth draft to the teacher.

8.4 Week 4:

Check the teacher's reply.

Complete the final draft.

9. Written Interaction Set Up

There was more practical and logistical difficulty setting up writing classes. More advanced notice is needed, along with more assurance about the value of using photos. As the popularity of the approach is on public record in school-wide evaluations etc., it was a powerful motivator to refer to. With the teacher taking the first photo essay picture, and using the teacher's photos as an example, student confidence and cooperation quickly grew.

10. Written Question Analysis

Questions are the engine of interaction, developing with the answers they elicit. The more sophisticated and diverse the former, the more scope there will be for answers to evolve. Here is a simple quantitative assessment of question lengths and types in Photo essays 2 and 4 focusing on student questions about the first draft describing this student's photo (see below).

10.1. Photo Essay 2 - Date: May, 2014;

4.6 words per question and 4 question types:

What is?; *How old*; *How long; Do you like?*
10.2 Photo Essay 4 - Date: July, 2014;
7.0 words per question and 9 question types:
Why; Where did; What kind of; Who is; Are they; What is; How many; Did you; How did you?
10.3. Subject and Questioners

The subject was a single student, chosen at random, and the questioners are the same each time. As well as longer questions (from 4.6 words up to 7.0) the increase in question type variety in the final photo essay (from 4 question types up to 9) seems to be of significance.

11. Photo Essay Analysis

We can examine the photo essay samples from the same student for signs of improvement, in the form of Photo essays 2 and 4 in their entirety.

11.1 Photo Essay 2 - Golden Week (Included and masked with permission)

Let me tell you about Japanese Golden Week. I think Japanese GW basically people cerebrate(s) national holidays (for) our country. And (do) party. But now Japanese people spend (usual) holiday as weekend. But it's longer than ( ) ordinary weekend about the GW so we go out (far) places or hang out.

Last year in GW I <u>didn't</u> enjoy the last years GW because I <u>had</u> exams after the GW. This year I <u>was</u> going to a cafe, and meet my best friends from high school, pray at a temple, and go shopping. And I <u>did</u> all these things. Next year I'<u>d</u> like to go back to my hometown and I <u>would</u> like to go and (trip) with my high school's best friends. I love them. I <u>enjoyed</u> this GW because I <u>did</u> all things (what) I thinking. The first day, May 3rd I <u>went</u> to my English teachers daughter's cafe!!! To meet her and eat her "panini." The panini <u>is</u> really delicious. So fluffy! And <u>tasted</u> good! I love her cafe! When I go to the café, the shop's atmosphere is good and she <u>is</u> beautiful and <u>makes</u> me (fun). I <u>was</u> glad to meet her again!

And ( ) second day, May 4th I (hunged) out with my high school's best friends! We <u>ate</u> ice creams, crepe, donuts!!! We <u>ate</u> (many) foods! And we <u>talked</u> a lot !!! After that we <u>went</u> to karaoke!!! This day <u>was</u> nice day too!

The third day, May 5th my family and I <u>went</u> to a rural temple and we <u>prayed</u> and we <u>saw</u> ( ) flower arrangement! It <u>was</u> so beautiful and I <u>was</u> impressed by the flowers. After that, my brother <u>wanted</u> to go to the sea, so we <u>went</u> to the sea. I <u>went</u> to the sea. It's been a long time to go, I <u>thought</u> WOW, omg how cool!!!! My brother <u>was</u> glad to go there because he <u>hadn't been</u> there! The day's dinner my family <u>ate</u> fried chicken! The taste it <u>was</u> delicious too!!! It <u>wasn't</u> too spicy!

The final day, my mother and I <u>went</u> to ( ) local department-store for shopping! I <u>wanted</u> to buy some clothes but finally only mother <u>bought</u> some clothes. I <u>couldn</u>'t buy anything! But I (was enjoying) to go to there with my mom. At (the) lunch time, I'<u>d been</u> longing to eat this pan-cake!!! Then at last I <u>ate</u> this! Anyway this day <u>was</u> happy too!

11.2. Photo Essay 4 - Last Summer

Let me tell you about Japanese summer. The main things include a Japanese woman <u>likes</u> <u>wearing</u> Yukata when they go to firework festivals. As you know, many Japanese go on a trip while they <u>have</u> a holiday! Some people like go to Tokyo and Okinawa or Osaka! And also some people like go to Hawaii, Guam, France or go many foreign places in summer, but many Japanese work hard even though it<u>'s</u> summer. We like go to ( ) sea and pool, and we <u>have</u> "Obon" for 3 days! During these days my (all) family gather and we pray for our ancestors!

Next let me tell you about Japanese high schools in summer. Some of the main things include the rules <u>are</u> looser than junior high school, which <u>means</u> I <u>went</u> to school by bus and some people go by bike. And also we can carry our phone! High school life <u>is</u> ( ) busiest in my life. We <u>have</u> to study math and science, geography, history, Japanese etc. Some people do club activity hard! Our high school <u>had</u> a cooler and it <u>was</u> fun, so we <u>could</u> spend ( ) time comfortably! Our high school summer holiday <u>was</u> only 18 days.

Now let me tell you about what I <u>did</u> last summer. Some of the main things <u>included</u>: I <u>hung</u> out with my best friends from high schools and <u>went</u> to English summer seminar for 3 days. In Obon I <u>prayed</u> for my grandma with my family. I <u>went</u> to Fukuoka to meet my grandpa! I <u>went</u> to Starbucks many times!

Next I<u>'ll</u> tell you about one memory from last summer! This <u>is</u> my photo when I <u>went</u> to Yufuin to join an English summer seminar! It <u>was</u> <u>held</u> on August 3 to August 5th. I <u>joined</u> with part of Oita prefectures high school students and teachers and ALTs! While I <u>was</u> in this seminar, I <u>met</u> this girl on the left from Hita City, but she <u>could</u> speak English fluently! The reason why <u>is</u> she <u>went</u> to study the United States for 1 year. And I <u>thought</u> I want to be like her. I'<u>m</u>

longing to meet her! I was inspired from her so much, and now I contact with her sometimes. I was really happy to join the seminar and to meet her!

Finally let me tell you about my plans for summer: this summer I'm going to go to Tokyo and visit Tokyo Disney Land.

12. Photo Essay Comparison

We can check developmental changes by comparing the following areas:

12.1. Photo essay #2 - Length: 400 words; Sentences: 42; Conjunctions: 19; Types: 6 (*and*; *because*; *but*; *when*; *so*; *or*)

12.2. Photo essay #4 - Length: 400 words; Sentences: 30; Conjunctions: 16; Types: 9 (*and*; *while*; *but*; *so*; *when*; *even though*; *which*; *or*)

Table 2 *Indicating increased sentence length/complexity*

Photo Essay	Words	Verb morphemes
#2 (May)	9.5 per sentence	0.97 per sentence
#4 (July)	13.3 per sentence	1.26 per sentence

Although Photo essay 4 had to use the present tense more, Table 2 shows a 30% increase. Sentence length also increased by about 40%, and conjunction types increased by 50% with less dependence on "and". Errors dropped to a quarter with a significant increase in a concise, natural mode, in contrast with the repetitiously restated form of the earlier photo essay. Next, we assess accuracy, complexity and fluency in the photo essays.

12.3. Accuracy - the amount of control a learner has over language categories, errors indicated by parentheses. The results were as follows:

Photo essay 2 related errors: 22

Photo essay 4 related errors: 5

Photo essay 2 had 4 times more errors, with an error ratio of 4:1 (22 errors down to 5).

12.4. Complexity - the willingness to use a variety of forms, indicated by the number of dependent clauses over the number of sentences. The results were as follows:

Photo essay 2 6/42 = 0.13

Photo essay 4 11/30 = 0.37

Photo essay 4 had 3 times as many dependent clauses per text divided by the number of sentences per text (0.13 to 0.37).

12.5 Fluency – the written language production speed, expressed as the number of dependent clauses over the average sentence length. The results were as follows:

Photo essay 2 6/9.5 = 0.63

Photo essay 4 11/13.3 = 0.83

Photo essay 4 had 30% more dependent clauses over average sentence length in words (0.63 to 0.83).

13. Conclusion

In the second round of spoken questioning, students mainly communicated without direct reference to photos. In the writing course, too, photos were also only the starting point for communication between students. Writing and conversation class students adapted quickly to independent learning. With decreasing teacher direction, students assisted each other to mirror their active cooperation in either situation. Progress in both classes was less due to individual student ability variation than to their in-class development, as confirmed by their parallel progress in questions. Though the samples given are limited and the analysis rudimentary, the results suggest that students can develop multiple competencies in this way, warranting wider-scale research in various contexts. While writing classes are compulsory with fixed sizes around 30 students each, conversation classes are optional and class sizes vary widely. On average, this writer's conversation student enrollers were double those of other classes, and received better feedback and higher ratings, as was also true for writing (see **Appendix**) thus suggesting that a photo-based approach can rival the status quo. The overall scores also exceeded school averages for every class, department and subject. All teaching styles have merits, but even teachers successful with texts could do more with photos. Effective teaching completely or partially without texts is feasible, but has yet to be recognized in mainstream ideology, let alone in widespread practice. However, with sufficient dissemination, it can gain the acceptance it deserves. Though samples cited are limited, they confirm both each other and the previous studies, and cannot therefore be easily dismissed. Using photos was based on the aim of interpersonal communication between students. As all the alternative methods are text-book based and do not require students to communicate with each other as their primary goal, it is difficult to compare approaches. However, the analysis results in this study (see **Tables 1** and **2** above) suggest students do develop linguistic and communicative competency in speaking and writing English by using their own photos. Also, feedback indicated that more confidence and satisfaction resulted than with texts. Regardless of how convenient they seem (texts selected change little from year to year) they are not the only or the best way to improve EFL communication. Without texts "washback" changes, but feedback suggests that that may be of less importance than widely believed in TEFL circles. For the first time since students' evaluations began at the writer's university over 10 years ago, my speaking and writing classes both received maximum scores. While these classes are regularly graded more highly than other teachers', the maturing of the student-photo approach use is evident. Another factor was eliminating exams, the other accepted source of washback. As their activity intensity took up all the class time, students were told each class was "the exam" as the communication there was both the learning experience and its own evaluation. Students responded

accordingly by maximizing their efforts, and the development that their performance demonstrated thus suggested that in-class motivation may be best ensured by making the main goal of study the communicative act itself. While it may be presumptuous to conclude that the motivation and indications of development consistently observed over 3 years, 10 classes and 300 students were proof positive of the objective worth of the method, they suggest that wider scale evaluations in various contexts are warranted.

Appendix – Student Feedback

Reinforcing the maximum numerical rankings of 5 points on students' evaluations for this writer's classes, feedback comments indicated what factors interested students most. Comment examples below confirm inter-student communication as their main motivation:

· *I enjoyed introducing my photographs to my class mates in English.*
· *It was easy to communicate with friends using photos instead of texts.*
· *I made new friends with students I didn't know before by using my photos.*
· *It was interesting to read each other's photo essays rather than using texts.*
· *We communicated with and learnt more about friends using photos.*
· *I learned how to communicate with others by using my photos.*

Especially for third year conversation students, any comment at all is significant as most do not have the time or interest to express opinions. In fact, most classes received passively negative zero feedback, compounded by low average enrollments below 50% of all potential takers, while the same classes alternating with this writer each semester attract up to 90%. As with writing classes the feedback received prioritized peer interaction:

· *I used what I learned in this class to communicate with international students.*
· *Using photos was good and everybody enjoyed talking together in English.*
· *I enjoyed using photos as I communicated with classmates and learnt a lot.*
· *Thanks to using photos in this class, I could make new friends*
· *Using photos is better as we can't communicate with each other using texts.*
· *I got lots of information using photos, even from those I never knew before.*
· *It was like studying English in an English-speaking country.*
· *I wish we could have this class every day!*

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