Top-Down and Communicative Vocabulary Learning

Hirosada IWASAKI

0. Introduction

"Where went you yesterday?" asked a Japanese student, who appreciated reading Shakespeare, Carlyle and other classics at school. It was through communication with such students that the well-known lexicographer A. S. Hornby finally decided in 1923 to give more attention to English language instruction and leave the teaching of literature to his Japanese colleagues (Hornby, 1974).

The present situation is no different from Hornby's days in the sense that many Japanese college and university students have quite limited communicative skills and poor vocabulary, which often comes as a surprise for native teachers both in Japan and abroad, considering Japan's allegedly high standards of education and numerous books on conversation and vocabulary available in bookshops. One teacher in University of Reading asked me, in all seriousness, "Why on earth do Japanese students have zero vocabulary?"

I address this question by exploring the nature of vocabulary problems experienced by foreign learners of English, particularly by Japanese students, and offer a variety of pre-communication, communication as well as post-communication activities aimed at resolving these difficulties. Emphasis is given to the use of 'conversation management' activities, monolingual dictionaries, word games/searches and computer corpora for vocabulary expansion and conversation skills development.

1. 1. Problems in teaching/learning vocabulary & speaking

When a foreign language learner encounters a vocabulary problem, in order to tackle it, he/she reverts to a particular communicative strategy (reported e.g. in Tarone 1977, Faerch and Kasper 1983; Bialystok 1990). The
possible problem solving strategies include the following (examples modified after Tarone 1977).

1) Avoidance
   a. Topic avoidance: The learner avoids reference to an object for which he/she does not have the necessary vocabulary (e.g. The learner plans to talk about the presidential election but decides not to, because it seems too difficult.)
   b. Message abandonment: The learner begins to refer to an object but gives up because it is too difficult (e.g. The learner starts to talk about the presidential debate, but changes the topic in the middle because it seems too difficult.)

2) Paraphrase
   a. Approximation: The learner uses an item known to be incorrect (a synonym or hypernym), but which shares some semantic features in common with the correct item (e.g. 'a kind of flower' for 'narcissus')
   b. Word coinage: The learner makes up a new word (e.g. 'teeth doctor' for 'dentist')
   c. Circumlocution: The learner describes the characteristics of the object instead of using the appropriate target language item: (e.g. It's made of metal. It has a handle. We use it to boil water.' for 'kettle')

3) Conscious transfer
   a. Literal translation: The learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g. 'appear the telephone' for 'answer the telephone')
   b. Language switch: The learner inserts words from another language (or uses loan words that may or may not exist in the target language) (e.g. 'panku' for 'puncture')

4) Appeal for assistance: The learner consults some authority - a native speaker, a dictionary (e.g. 'What do you call a doctor for animals?')

5) Mime: The learner uses a non-verbal device to refer to an object or event (e.g. chopping to indicate 'cooking' or 'kitchen')

The choice of a strategy in a given communicative situation depends on
many factors, such as the native culture of the L2 learner, the communicative strategies preferred in the native language, the degree of pressure/urgency/importance of the current communicative goal, communication partner, external factors (e.g., degree of noise), communication media (face to face, telephone, etc). Much individual difference is found in preferred strategies, and even the same speaker can choose different strategies in similar situations (Bialystok 1990, Takahashi, Midorikawa & Wada 1995).

Regarding the ways Japanese learners of English overcome vocabulary induced difficulties, firstly, many teachers observe critically or jokingly that the only strategy found in this case is avoidance, which often results in total silence. Or these learners just revert to miming/gesticulating and direct L1 to L2 translation. Even the Appeal for Assistance is rare, whereas Paraphrase is a skill which appears to be totally lacking. We will see later how teachers can encourage these strategies among students.

Secondly, it is sometimes believed that the avoidance strategy favored by Japanese learners may have its root not in insufficient vocabulary, but in their shyness to speak up (Yule 1996). In order to challenge this misconception I conducted a small study reported below which clearly testifies to the English vocabulary poverty of Japanese learners.

1. 2. A study of knowledge of basic collocations knowledge by Japanese learners of English

Collocations are habitual co-occurrences of words, without which learners cannot actively use even basic vocabulary (Bahns 1993, Benson 1985, Benson, Benson & Ilson (eds.) 1986). The word *information*, for example, collocates with such verbs as *get, obtain, give, provide, retrieve, leak*, etc. and with such adjectives as *accurate, correct, authentic, classified, biased*, etc.

In order to test the English vocabulary of Japanese learners I selected 10 basic collocations and designed a questionnaire requiring the respondents to fill in the English equivalent next to the Japanese translation of these collocations. The 83 respondents who took part in the study were first-year students of the University of Tsukuba majoring in different subjects (except English) and had intermediate level proficiency in English. Table 1 below lists the collocation items
in the questionnaire along with the Japanese students' responses (with their numbers and percentile) and also provides a comparison with the native speakers' data from the Bank of English (http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk).

Table 1. English collocations produced by Japanese students
(compared to native speakers' use)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collocations</th>
<th>Responses (No / %)</th>
<th>Bank of English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) 'jisho o hiku' ( ) a dictionary (when you encounter difficult words)</td>
<td>consult* (19/23%); take (11/13%); look into (5/6%); look up (4/7%); look up in (3/3%); look, use* see, search (2/2%); draw, look on, look for, look up a word in* , look in, play, make, consult with, put up, have, pick up, pull (1/1%)</td>
<td>use, look at, check, look in, look (sth) up in, check, read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) 'kasa o nasu' ( ) an umbrella (when it starts raining)</td>
<td>take (38/46%); use* (11/13%); have, open* (4/ 5%); make, put (2/2%); bring, put on, get (1/1%);NA (19/23%)</td>
<td>use, open, unfurl, hold, put up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) 'jocho o eru' ( ) information (when you want to know something)</td>
<td>get* ( 40/48%); take (11/14%); have* (10/12%); catch (9/11%); give, make, listen to (1/1%);NA (10/12%)</td>
<td>collect, acquire, have, receive, get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) 'isha ni mite morau' ( ) a doctor (when you are not feeling well)</td>
<td>see* (59/71%); consult* (5/6%); take (3/4%); send, watch, (2/2%); conduct, have, get, go, make, be advised (1/1%); NA (6/7%)</td>
<td>see, consult, go to the doctor's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) 'jisa boke de aru' ( ) jet lag (after a long flight to a foreign country)</td>
<td>have* (16/19%); take (11/13%); get* (4/5%); feel* (3/4%); be, be in, lose, (2/2%); make, become, go abroad (1/1%); NA (39/47%)</td>
<td>have, get, feel, suffer from, suffer, be affected by, catch up on ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) 'shasin o toru' --- a picture (when you see a beautiful scene)</td>
<td>take* (78/94%); catch, have (1/1%); NA (3/4%)</td>
<td>get, take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) 'tehpu o uragaesu' ( ) a tape (when you want to listen to the other side)</td>
<td>turn (22/27%); reverse (13/16%); return (6/7%); change (2/2%); back, set up, upset, turn up, take, upside down, put ... aside, be side, put ... under over, turn over* (1/1%); NA (30/36%), cf. flip ... over (0/0%)</td>
<td>flip ... over, turn over</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 1 shows, even though the tested lexis was very basic, the students' knowledge of collocations proves to be insufficient. For example, less than 25% of the students were able to give appropriate collocations for *dictionary*, like *consult* and *use*, and less than 20% provided such common collocations for *umbrella* as *use* or *open*.

There are two groups of reasons for this lack of productive vocabulary knowledge. The first concerns the teaching/learning practice. English words are introduced in isolation rather than in collocations. That is, instead of acquiring the word *umbrella* in collocations such as *put up [unfurl] an umbrella*, learners simply memorize the isolated word and its Japanese equivalent. Other contributing factors are no or little time on productive classroom exercises, and low motivation to use English in everyday life.

The second major obstacle in vocabulary acquisition is the L1 interference. Let us consider some collocations which caused much or no difficulty (reflected correspondingly in low or high percent of correct collocation responses) comparing them with respective Japanese collocations (*asterisks (*) indicate cases where direct translation from Japanese does not yield the correct collocation in English*)

| 8) 'miburah o kubi ni maku' ( ) a scarf around your neck (when you go out on a cold day) | take, wear* (9/11%); put on* (5/6%); have (4/5%); put (3/4%); roll, make, muffle, tie, put in, have ... on*, warm (1/1%); NA (44/53%) | tie, wrap, wear, have, fling, throw, place |
| 9) 'rei o ageru' ( ) an example (when you explain something) | take (43/52%); make (9/11%); give* (4/5%); show*, set, have (2/2%); for, take for (1/1%); NA (19/23%) | give, provide, have, [see/take, for example, .. |
| 10) 'kabin ni han o ikeru' ( ) a flower in a vase (when you want to decorate your room) | put* (13/16%); make (9/11%); set (6/7%); take (5/6%); give (2/2%); arrange*, put in, place, show, see, live, water (1/1%); NA (42/51%) | put, stick, (arrange) |

Note: (Figures in parentheses show response numbers & percentile; '*' indicates appropriate responses. The Japanese part was written in Japanese in the actual questionnaire, but is romanized here for ease of reference)
These examples show that high proportion of correct responses is found in the case where direct transfer from L1 (Japanese) is possible, whereas incorrect responses occur when the direct transfer from L1 (Japanese) yields inappropriate results in English. Very similar results were also obtained for foreign learners of English with other native languages, e.g. German (Bahns, 1993). The question of how to prevent this type of L1 interference remains open, and we shall come back to this point later with reference to monolingual dictionaries.

2. Pre-communication activities: Controlling conversations and using echo questions

We have seen some problems involved in English vocabulary acquisition, and I shall next suggest ways of tackling them in class starting with simple vocabulary building activities which will give an instant boost to learners' communication ability. These activities can be performed at the pre-communication, communication and post-communication stages.

Before actually starting L2 communication, the first step in improving speaking skills can be explicit teaching of vocabulary related to conversation management or control. The teacher can start by giving printouts and practicing situationally grouped conversation management 'tips'. The example given below shows alternatives to the avoidance strategy, common among Japanese learners and exercised in cases when they do not understand or cannot follow what is going on.

1) When the learner doesn't understand what the speaker is saying
   a. I don't understand you.
   b. I'm not following you.
   c. I don't know what you are saying.
2) When the learner wants the speaker to repeat what they said.
   a. Could you say that again?
   b. Could you repeat your question?
   c. (I beg your) pardon?
3) When the learner wants the speaker to speak more slowly, loudly, etc.
   a. Could you speak more slowly [loudly]?
   b. I'm afraid you are speaking too fast.
4) When the learner doesn't understand a specific word or expression
   a. I don't know the word XXX.
   b. What does XXX mean?

One particular tool for enhancing communication is the so called fillers or backchannel signals. They can be used to show that the listener is following the conversation. Common fillers suggested for practice (Yule 1996) are:

   I see. / Aha. / Really? / Oh, did you? (Does she? Can they?) / Is that so? / That's great. /Good. / Oh, no.

   In contrast, when speakers need to make sure of the listener's attention or understanding, the fillers below are helpful:

   (Do) You understand? / Do you know what I mean? / Are you with me? / Does it sound funny?

   The second suggested pre-communication activity is learning echo questions, which many native teachers of English take for granted. We will see below when this is particularly useful. Authentic communication is often said to be message-focused, rather than form-focused (Lynch 1996, Widdowson 1978, McDonough and Shaw 1993, etc.) However, a substantial part of classroom talk often consists of the form-focused pattern practice:

   Teacher: I'm going to buy a car.
   Student 1: But you can't drive, can you?
Teacher: BIKE.
Student 2: I'm going to buy a bike.
Student 3: But you can't ride, can you?

(Byrne 1976)

The main focus of the above practice is on acquiring a certain pattern. By contrast, a message focused activity is concerned with information gaps. Every learner is provided with one part of jigsawed information, and learners need to communicate to reconstruct the whole (Geddes 1981).

The following example of message focused pair work employing jigsawed information was adapted from an authentic pamphlet of a British car rental company. Each learner is given a different sheet showing car rental fees on a daily or weekly basis with different gaps in every sheet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handout for Group A</th>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact 4 Door</td>
<td>248</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Size 2 Door</td>
<td>(</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Size 4 Door</td>
<td>283</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convertible</td>
<td>329</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini Van 7 Seat</td>
<td>329</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(UK pounds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handout for Group B</th>
<th>Car</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economy 2 Door</td>
<td>238</td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compact 4 Door</td>
<td>248</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Size 2 Door</td>
<td>283</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Size 4 Door</td>
<td>(</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convertible</td>
<td>329</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>329</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(UK pounds)
Learners from group A and group B are paired. They need to fill in gaps in the sheets by information exchange, e.g. asking and answering WH questions ('What car costs 238 pounds a week and 34 pounds a day?' 'How much does a compact 4 door cost a day?').

One possible pre-communication exercise to be performed before the start of this activity is the practice of echo questions such as 'A convertible costs how much a day?' or 'A full-size 4 door costs how much a week?' The advantage of echo questions in contrast to ordinary WH questions is that learners do not have to bother to change the word order, and they can concentrate more on the message itself rather than the grammatical form.

1) A compact 4 door costs 36 pounds. (statement)
2) How much does a compact 4 door cost? (WH question)
3) A compact 4 door costs how much? (echo question)

Practicing echo questions also exposes Japanese students to a larger variety of grammar-syntactical structures used in modern English.

3. Pre-communication activities: Introducing monolingual dictionaries

A range of activities, including pre-communication ones can be performed with monolingual dictionaries. Japanese learners even at a university level are not routinely exposed to monolingual dictionaries, and among researchers and EFL teachers there is a common prejudice against the use of monolingual dictionaries for enhancing L2 speech production: 'A bilingual dictionary is useful for both reception and production, whereas monolingual dictionaries have a weak spot when it comes to production' (Svartvik 1999). In fact, as I shall try to demonstrate, monolingual dictionaries can be successfully used not only for vocabulary building but also for speaking. Especially, their definitions can be used effectively as a mini-database and a method of avoiding L1 collocational interference.

Understating the value of monolingual dictionaries may result from the faulty theoretical approach to their place in TEFL. The so-called bottom-up approach to the monolingual dictionary sanctions its use for analysis and
interpretation of the information present in the text whereby smaller units are processed first, then larger units, and eventually the whole text. To illustrate this, suppose a learner finds the word *arrogant* difficult and refers to a dictionary for its meaning.

*arrogant* adj unpleasantly proud and behaving as if you are more important than, or know more than, other people (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*)

After reading this definition the learner will hopefully come to understand the word's meaning and may come up with an L1 equivalent. This process seems to be quite straightforward, but since the definition is in the target language the process is not as easy as using a bilingual dictionary. Therefore, this bottom-up processing with a monolingual dictionary is not ideal for foreign learners of English, especially at low levels of English proficiency.

The alternative is the top-down use of monolingual dictionaries, where learners refer to definitions of a particular word they already know or the meaning of which they have guessed from the text. To contrast the two approaches, let us see the following definition.

a person whose job is to put out fires (*Longman Active Study Dictionary*)

If a bottom-up approach is taken, the learner tries to grasp what concept this definition refers to, and the knowledge of the phrasal verb put out is most crucial. In other words, unless the learner knows the meaning of *put out* (fires) he/she cannot comprehend the meaning of the word fireman or firefighter.

If we adopt a top-down approach, on the other hand, the learner begins with the concept or L1 equivalent of *firefighter/fireman* in mind. This dramatically changes the situation; even if the learners do not have the previous knowledge of the phrasal verb *put out*, they can predict that this means 'extinguish'. This is because they know what firefighters do, especially to 'fires', from their previous experience and knowledge of this occupation. This contrast of the two approaches may be illustrated graphically as follows.
Top-down and Communicative Vocabulary Learning

This diagram shows that a bottom-up processing of monolingual definitions requires lexical and syntactic analysis of definitions of difficult words to understand what they mean; in contrast, with a top-down approach, learners look at words whose meanings they already know and process their definitions.

I therefore proceed with the assumption that top-down approach allows the most efficient use of the monolingual dictionary, and the activities offered below are framed within this approach.

The first activity is to read definitions of words whose meanings learners already know, e.g.

**banana:** a J-shaped fruit with a yellow skin and white flesh inside (slightly adapted from *Longman Dictionary of American English*, 1st ed.)

Since the learners are already familiar with the word itself, the first point of reading the definition is in noting descriptors used. The teacher draws students' attention to the expression *J-shaped*, then other shapes can be discussed, e.g. *finger-shaped, ball-shaped*, etc. The learners gain experience of describing different shapes without using difficult words, e.g. without knowing the word *oval* the
students can characterize a lemon as *egg-shaped*.

Second, attention should be directed to the whole defining frame: 'a ... fruit with a ... skin and ... flesh.' This can be applied to almost any other fruit, so learners should be able to describe many other fruits with this frame. An apple is 'a ball-shaped fruit with a red or green skin and sweet yellow flesh.' A lemon is 'an egg-shaped fruit with a yellow skin and very sour flesh,' etc. After creating within a given frame their own definition of a word, the students later compare it with the one entered in the monolingual dictionary.

Another example is the following sample definition of *dog*.

**dog:** a common four-legged flesh-eating animal often kept as a pet (slightly changed from Longman Dictionary of American English, 1st ed.)

Once again, it is worth noting that *flesh-eating* is quite a handy expression. Although there are technical terms such as *carnivore* or *carnivorous*, learners do not have to know them. Moreover, although it is impossible to change *carnivorous* into *herbivorous* automatically, it is no difficult task to change *flesh-eating* into *plant-eating* or *grass-eating* by combining words learners already know. Actually this wording is used in a monolingual dictionary:

**sheep:** a grass-eating farm animal that is kept for its wool and its meat

(*Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 3rd ed.*)

The whole point here is to familiarize students with monolingual dictionaries by using definitions of words which learners already know and by having them recognize definition types and expressions applicable to many other things.

4. **Communication activities: Guessing and defining things**

Monolingual dictionaries can be very useful at the stage of communication activities as well. For example, a guessing game can be used with a monolingual dictionary following the procedure outlined below.
1) Each member of the group chooses a familiar noun (e.g. dictionary).
2) The first speaker reads the definition of that word in a monolingual dictionary without mentioning that word. (e.g., 'book giving a list of words in alphabetical order, with their meaning' (Longman Handy Learner's Dictionary)). If the dictionary uses sentential definitions like those of COBUILD, the speaker needs to replace the headword with 'da da da,' as in 'A da da da is a book in which the words and phrases of a language are listed alphabetically, ... (Collins COBUILD English Dictionary, 3rd ed.).
3) The rest of the group guess what is being defined.
4) If other members cannot get the word, the speaker reads the definition again, modifies it, or adds more information of his/her own, until someone makes a successful guess.

This activity involves listening practice, but the idea is to get learners familiar with definitions or explanations of common things. It should be noted that even lower level learners can participate, because all they need to do is choose a word and read its definition. More advanced learners can modify a definition or freely add their own background information. This can lead to explaining things totally in their own words.

The second communication activity I would like to introduce is a definition game. This time, learners are encouraged to define or explain things by themselves with the help of monolingual dictionaries. This is a group activity and can be conducted as follows.

1) Briefly review basic defining types (especially for tools)
   (X: target word, C1: collocation indicating use or function; C2: collocation for the target word)
   a. X is/means Y to [for, when, etc.] C1.
      e.g. An umbrella is something to keep rain off the head.
   b. You C2 (X) to [for, when, etc.] C1.
      e.g. You open an umbrella to keep rain off the head.
   c. You C1 with [by, etc.] X.
      e.g. You keep rain off the head with an umbrella.
d. X C1.

   e.g. An umbrella keeps rain off your head.

2) Each group member writes (either in English or in Japanese) a word denoting some commonly known object on a sheet of paper and passes it to the next person.

3) Students in turn define the word written on their sheet until someone guesses the word.

4) If the speaker finds it difficult to define the target object, he/she can consult a monolingual dictionary for 30 seconds and afterwards re-starts the explanation.

This activity requires the students to define the target object, and is therefore more advanced than the guessing game described above. However, both activities share the same aim: to familiarize learners with defining or explaining things. Alternatively, illustrations can be used for this purpose (See Hadfield 1984, 1990 for various photocopiable materials).

After learners feel more comfortable with defining things, the teacher can introduce another more complex activity which requires explaining unconventional or uncommon use of the target object.

1) Each member of the group imagines and explains unconventional uses of the target object, without mentioning either the object or its conventional use.

   e.g. umbrella: 'You can use this in a fencing game. We can dry our washing on it.

2) The rest of the group guess the object.

   This activity is aimed at reviewing the way things are defined, by focusing on their unconventional use in a fun way. The idea still is to get familiar with defining things with emphasis on their functions.

   In all the above described activities a monolingual dictionary functions as a mini-database which help learners define or explain things. This only becomes possible if monolingual dictionaries are used within a top-down approach whereby
students consult them not with the purpose of understanding the meanings of unknown words, but in order to read, process and employ for speaking activities the definitions of already familiar words.

5. Post-communication activity: More on collocation finding in monolingual dictionaries

In post communication activities monolingual dictionaries can add to learners' collocational knowledge. For example, a practice can be done with the following steps.

1) Show learners a list of target collocations or specific expressions either written in Japanese or visualized in illustrations: e.g. put out a fire, draw a straight line, etc.

2) Have them guess first what headword in a monolingual dictionary may contain these target collocations.

3) Have them refer to the definition of that headword to see if the target expression may be found; if not have them try a different headword or a different dictionary if available.

4) Have them retrieve only the target expressions from definitions, ignoring other words.

Let us look at how this works in practice. Take chokusen o hiku (draw straight lines) and joho o hozon suru (store information), for example. First, learners guess what headword may have the target expressions in their definitions in such frames as 'somebody who does X [target collocation]' or 'something that does X.' Learners can easily come up with the correct answers: a ruler (for drawing straight lines) and computer, floppy disk, hard disk, etc. (for storing information).

Next the learners look at definitions of these headwords.

1) chokusen o hiku (draw straight lines)

   a. ruler: a long, flat, narrow piece of a hard material such as plastic, which has straight edges and is marked with inches for centimetres. It is used for measuring things or for drawing straight lines
(Longman Active Study Dictionary, 2nd ed.)

b. A ruler is a long flat object with straight edges used for measuring things or drawing straight lines. (Collins COBUILD New Student's Dictionary)

2) joho o hozon suru (store information/data)

a. computer: an electronic machine that can store, organize and find information, do calculations and control other machines

(Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 6th ed.)
b. A floppy disk is a flexible magnetic disk for storing data for use in a computer. (Chambers Essential English Dictionary)

Not the words per se, but their common collocations are the object of study in this activity. Further examples are shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target collocations</th>
<th>Target words to be looked into</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. follow/observe rules</td>
<td>umpire, police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. suck blood</td>
<td>mosquito / leech / vampire / Dracula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. fill one's teeth</td>
<td>dentist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. pull a cork out of a bottle</td>
<td>corkscrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. attract the attention (of people)</td>
<td>door knocker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. add flavor</td>
<td>sauce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that with this method, learners can find relevant collocations avoiding the direct translation from L1. For example, to find an English equivalent for ame ni nure nai yoni suru (try not to get wet in the rain) students can refer to the definition of umbrella:

umbrella: a thing that you hold above your head to protect you from the rain

(Longman Dictionary of American English, 2nd. ed.)

This definition suggests the expression 'protect (you) from the rain,' which is quite different from the direct translation of the target expression.

a. target expression: ameni nure nai youi suru
b. direct translation: try not to get wet in the rain
c. collocation found: protect from the rain

Thus monolingual dictionaries can help learners to acquire English collocations and other expressions preventing or blocking the L1 interference inevitable in direct translation.

6. Post-communication activity: Use of corpora in language learning

At the upper-intermediate or advanced levels, learners' vocabulary can be greatly empowered through the reference to corpora. Machine-readable data of English, or English corpora, have been long available for research purposes. With the advances in hardware and software resources it has become considerably easier to bring them into language classrooms.

Leech (1997) outlines three ways of including corpora in teaching environments: direct use of corpora in teaching, corpora indirectly applied to teaching, and further teaching-oriented corpus development. Among these we focus on direct use of corpora for raising collocations awareness since firstly, as we have already seen earlier, collocations constitute a problem for FL learners world-wide as well as in Japan, and secondly, because corpora provide learners with a wide and authentic perspective on collocations in current language.

Although a large variety of different types of corpora is available, I have used in class and can recommend the following Internet accessible free on-line corpora:

a. The Bank of English (http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk)
b. The British National Corpus (http://thetis.bl.uk)

If the Internet is not available then the teacher can chose from commercially available CD-ROM corpora or reference CD-ROMs, such as encyclopedia or newspaper data.

Corpora are helpful to learners in many ways, and especially when the information on collocations is unavailable in the conventional dictionary. Even if we take a fairly common word such as jet lag and trace its collocations in major
dictionaries, we can only find very little.

Collocations of *jet lag*

g. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 6th ed.: not available
h. *COBUILD English Dictionary*, 3rd ed.: no example, but its sentential definition

says: 'If you are suffering from *jet lag*, you feel tired...'

While the major dictionaries show either very little or no collocational information for space saving reasons, a concordance comes to rescue with a vast selection of collocational options and even their frequencies, e.g.

Concordance for *jet lag* (from the Bank of English)

- energy which helps to alleviate *jet lag* by keeping your blood sugar levels
- Although Judith Parker avoided *jet-lag* when they returned to Britain, her bull; Walk around the plane every
- but they always help me beat *jet-lag.* is well-known. I have one piece of
- on the various ways to combat *jet lag* and is useful to counteract
- and is useful to counteract *jet lag.* Arsen. alb. For severe
- as effective in countering *jet lag.* The body will adjust naturally to the
- It was almost enough to cure *jet-lag* instantly. I can't remember having such
- AAPSPORT Reds fight *jet lag* SYDNEY: The Western Reds were placed under
- ne who has ever suffered from *jet lag.* or worked night shifts will testify, the body
- human travellers recover from *jet lag.* Technology: Suicide genes kill cancer
- Kids that age don't get *jet lag* because they can go five days without sleep
- you'll be right as rain." I had *jet lag,* but I declined the shot and accepted a Bloody
- I have just about got over his *jet lag* from Australia and he's off to Monaco .
- Botham, who had minimised his *jet lag* by spending a night en-route in Sydney, was
- to bright light can reduce *jet lag* by supressing circad ium rythms and altering
Now the following collocates can be extracted for use in learners' production activities: alleviate, avoid, beat, cause, combat, counter, counteract, cure, fight, get, get over, have, minimise, recover from, reduce, suffer from.

In this way collocational information from corpora can resolve the collocation deficit in the dictionaries and supplement students' knowledge in this area.

The second way to use corpus-driven learning to raise collocational awareness is to compare concordances of synonyms. Foreign learners of English need assistance to develop a feeling for the contextual difference of words otherwise known as 'semantic prosody': 'A consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates' (Louw 1993:157).

Let us consider how concordance information on the collocations of two synonyms (the words plump and obese) provides insights into their semantics and contextual function.

Concordance for plump (from the Bank of English)

- the same for both mouth and bone.
- always looked good. She had a high
- Moorish cafe where you can loll on
- MUSHROOM FARM Grow
- wriggling on my stomach chanting"
- In spite of her smiling face the
- up to reveal a purple swelling on a
- seems an unlikely corrupter of youth.
- Kate buys fresh Atlantic salmon and
- with straps biting deep into plump
- school in Kent. She was a retiring,

Plump, angels perch on top of these
plump, plump
plump, plump
delicious mushrooms in just four
plump, green and juicy" to a line-up of
plump, hand holding the teapot had not
plump, marble-white calf. My!" the
plump, neatly dressed in a suit and tie,
plump, oysters and whips up an excellent
plump, shoulders `Her navel would be
plump, plain little girl, preferring

Concordance for obese (from the Bank of English)

- the world were now overweight or
- that you're more likely to become
- undoubtedly the world's most
- loss diets and exercise for the
- overweight making him dangerously

obese. Children not showing athletic
obese and that means a higher risk of
obese and oily vegetarians. To serve the
obese, and a variety of drugs.
obese, And at last the 56-year-old has
and repulsed by the sight of his obese customers devouring their greasy
are designed to help the severely obese lose a large amount of weight
the number of abnormal forms. Obese men are less fertile than the slim.
diets effective in helping severely obese patients get started losing weight.
is greatly increased. At 45 an obese person has three times the risk of
currently eating. People who are very obese tend to overeat. This may be
shortens your life. If you're obese, the risk of dying from heart

A semantic comparison of the collocates for these two words reveals that plump
has some positive implications (as in *plump angels; plump mushrooms; plump
green and juicy, etc*), although it may occasionally have negative connotations as
well (*plump plain little girl*). On the other hand, the semantic field of 'obese' bears
a definite negative charge (*dangerously obese, grossly obese, very obese tend to
overeat, etc*). Or the word obese is used in a medical context (*obese patients*).
Dictionary notes can also help learners recognize such differences between
synonyms. For example, the usage note of LDOCE3 gives the following explanation

a. If you want to be polite about someone, do not say that they are *fat*. (A
little) *overweight* or just *large* is a more polite way of saying the same thing.
b. *Plump* is most often used of women and children and means slightly (and
pleasantly) *fat*.
c. If someone is extremely fat and unhealthy they are *obese*. *Obese* is also the
word used by doctors.

Thus learners' collocational awareness can be enhanced by concordance lines in
combination with dictionary notes.

6. Pedagogic implications and further research

All these suggestions imply that there is still a great need for teachers
to specifically teach dictionary search skills in class, as suggested in Atkins &
Varontola (1998a, 1998b). Such skills are vital for learners to successfully extract
rich information from dictionaries, which lexicographers have cleverly put into
them.

However, the direct comparison of the use of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries in Atkins & Varantola (1998a) is not very fruitful because the efficiency of the use of either dictionary type depends on the approach selected. As we have seen above, when we utilize monolingual definitions with the top-down processing, they have advantage with which no bilingual dictionary can compare. On the other hand, when a learner is simply trying to find a Japanese equivalent, especially at the beginner level, for a particular difficult English word, a bilingual definition most suits their purpose.

Modern dictionaries still have important shortcomings in that they cannot incorporate all the textual information (Rogers & Ahmad, 1998). And I fully support the desire already expressed by some researchers to have some day dictionaries 'whose design and contents are rich and flexible' (Hulstijn & Atkins, 1998:10)

I therefore suggest the following directions of further research in the use of dictionaries in class.

1) Investigation of the approaches enabling the most efficient use of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries
2) Defining a set of optimal activities performed with either kind of dictionaries within these approaches
3) Investigating various ways of creating a close link between vocabulary development with dictionaries and speaking activities
4) Investigating attitudes of learners towards dictionaries across cultural, gender and individual learner characteristics

I believe that future use of both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, especially in electronic form, will be far beyond 'looking up words.' They will provide learners with direct knowledge of far-reaching collocations, pronunciation, non-verbal expressions, visual examples of communicative strategies, etc.

How about corpora in classroom? Ever since corpora started to be used in EFL, there have been debates between their proponents and sceptics who were questioning whether corpora represent 'real English' and whether foreign learners
need such English (Gavioli & Aston, 2001; Biber & Conrad, 2001; Carter, 1998; Cook, 1998). It has been claimed that corpora may represent 'wrong' (e.g. radio speech) model, that learners may not need the native model at all (Cook, 1998), or, by contrast, when they DO represent natural conversational speech, it is so strongly stuffed with 'natives' culture that it becomes incomprehensible for EFL learners (Widdowson, 1998).

It appears that such arguments are unfounded in the case of teaching English as a foreign language, because many other kinds of media are also available for learners, such as video or audio materials, and corpora can coexist with these materials.

Of course, the choice of a sub-corpus depends on the skill to be developed: spoken sub-corpora like those in the Bank of English or British National Corpus are best suited for exploiting vocabulary for speaking, whereas written corpora are naturally preferable for teaching writing and reading. 'Difficult' extracts from corpora can be edited, corpora can be graded by level, and learners DO seem to be interested in using them (Gavioli & Aston, 2001; McCarthy & Carter, 2001). Therefore, corpora are suitable for work in class and for self learning, for a variety of activities and for individual, group and pair-work (Gavioli & Aston, 2001), which makes them an invaluable tool in the language teaching.

It appears that a matter of greater concern than the 'false alarms' given above is the search for best integrating of corpora-related activities into communication practice. On the one hand, in the area of 'informationalism' (Warschauer, 2000) the amount of computer-mediated communication is going to increase and diversify in near future (Murray, 2000), which suggests that by teaching the use of corpora to our students we are providing them with a useful skill. On the other hand, computers cannot replace human-to-human verbal interaction. The problem is that Japanese younger generations, probably like others, are already heavily dependent on computer-games, mobile phones, emails, etc., often using only graphemes or very short words. All these often trigger miscommunication with 'non-peers' when they grow up.

Therefore, we need to remember that the ultimate goal of computer-aided, dictionary-aided and other kinds of language teaching is not only in hammering a certain number of English phrases into the students' heads, but in
developing their practical communication abilities.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have seen the lack of communicative skills and knowledge of collocations among Japanese learners. To overcome this situation, specific communication skills and use of monolingual dictionaries and corpora were suggested. And their pedagogical implications and future visions were also discussed.

I hope that this paper will at least partly help language teachers to take care in navigating their EFL class between techno-infatuation and techno-cynicism and will encourage them to combine recent innovations in educational technologies with non-traditional applications of the established tools like monolingual dictionaries for building students' vocabulary and speaking skills.

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