

Changes in the English Language Programs at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University: I. Needs Analysis and Objectives for the Policy Management Courses

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Following evaluation of the first two years of the English courses at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University, changes have been initiated that have resulted in a fundamental shift in emphasis and content in the curriculum of all three Faculties. This paper introduces the issues facing both students and staff in arriving at a satisfactory curriculum for English in an environment where the learning of English as a Foreign Language begins as a relatively low priority for many students. The basics of curriculum development are briefly reviewed, including summaries of the language learning philosophy driving the English curriculum, and of the process of defining the curriculum aims and objectives informed by needs analyses. A brief outline is given of some of the initial proposals for a new English curriculum in the Faculty of Policy Management, the implementation of which began in April 2001.

1. Introduction: issues in curriculum design in the Faculty of Policy Management

The current English curriculum in the Faculty of Policy Management (PM) at Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University (TBGU) caters for the first- and second-year students: there is no English course allocation for third- and fourth-year students. English is compulsory for the first three semesters, with each one-semester course comprising four 90-minute classes per week. Many of the current students sat their entrance examination in Mathematics in preference to English, and have expressed some confusion at having to study English so intensively. Current discussions on changes to the curriculum therefore include a

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Table 1. Non-language courses currently available in the Policy Management curriculum.

1. Basic Subjects

Micro-Economics	Mathematics	Modern World History	Principles of Economics
Macro-Economics	Statistics & Analysis	Accounting Language	Introductory Business Economics
Introductory Law	Modern Philosophy	Data Processing	Communication in Society
Political Science	Sociology	Social Survey Methods	History of Political Philosophy
Constitutional Law	Asian Studies	Cultural Anthropology	

2. Basic Specialist Studies

Policy Management	Business Organization	Economic Policy Management
The Natural Environment	Environmental Economics	Environmental Resource Economics
Social Welfare Policy	Social Security	Introduction to International Relations
Government Processes	Commercial Law	Introductory Criminal Law
American Studies	Administrative Law	Civil Law
Asian Studies	Regional Transportation Geography & Tourism	

3. Third and Fourth Year Specialist Studies Related to Political Control

Community Economics	Local Government	International Political Economics
International Relations	International Co-operation	Administrative Organization
Social Overhead Capital	International Economics	Local Enterprises
Urban Policy	Local Government Finance	Legislative Drafting
Non-Profit Organizations		

4. Third and Fourth Year Specialist Studies Related to Social Management

Regional Policy	Public Utilities	International Corporate Management
Business Analysis	Business Policy	Issues of Small & Medium Enterprises
Financial Policies	Marketing Policy	Distribution Economics
Money Circulation	Local Industries	

consideration of possible ways to reorganize the distribution and proportion of obligatory classes.

One of the biggest difficulties in setting up the PM English curriculum has been the absence of a clear set of objectives concerning the exact roles that PM students will play in society. With degree course units on topics in Accounting, Economics and Management Studies (Table 1), the PM degree has some of the characteristics of a degree in Business Administration, and graduates in PM are expected to be among the entrepreneurs of tomorrow (cf. Table 2).

There is a clearly perceived need on the part of the university administration for English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with an eye to current and future developments in Japanese business practices; and it has been recognized that currently many companies require certain minimum scores on the Test of English for International Communication

Table 2. The general institutional goals/philosophy of education at TBGU, with particular reference to the Faculty of Policy Management.*

Students will acquire the requisite skills and knowledge to perform usefully in the world of work, in terms of being able to

- pass a public examination as a positive step towards gaining employment
- gain employment and follow a useful, fulfilling career
- use information technology effectively
- think independently to recognize, critically assess and resolve problems
- understand the potentials and limitations of communication among groups and individuals
- understand cultural differences
- take a global viewpoint, appreciating and respecting people and customs of other cultures
- use English effectively for work and/or pleasure
- communicate in one or two other Asian languages
- communicate with foreign friends and visitors
- work comfortably and confidently with Japanese or foreign colleagues, in Japan or abroad
- contribute positively to Japanese and international society by making wise decisions for courses of action
- communicate own opinions on self-nominated problems
- discuss current policies and general affairs occurring at local, national and international levels

* Translated and summarized from various written documents distributed by, and from discussions with, the administrative staff at TBGU.

(TOEIC) in order for employees to progress satisfactorily through in-house assessments for promotion. However, there are a number of factors working against this perceived need for TOEIC-related studies: the average English proficiency levels of the current PM undergraduate intake are generally perceived as “moderate”; there is considerable inertia among PM students to study English to a level suitable to achieve meaningful scores on the TOEIC; and currently English is available only in the first four semesters.

In addition to obligatory English in the first two years, students study Asian languages (e.g. Korean, Chinese) and topics such as Economics, Law, Business Administration and Cultural Studies, with an emphasis on “international understanding.” Other courses that students will study (in Japanese) during their four undergraduate years are listed in Table 1. The content of these courses should provide a wealth of knowledge for students to draw upon for their use in the different units of the English curriculum but such a level of integration is currently in the early stages only.

Table 3. Profile of prospective English learners reading Policy Management at TBGU.*

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- Japanese high-school graduates from the Sendai area
 - broad range of academic ability
 - future career undecided
 - hoping to sit a national examination(s) to facilitate job entry and promotion
 - supplementing finances by part-time work, usually in the evenings, and not uncommonly working night shifts 3-7 days a week (i.e. will have very short attention time in class; prone to dozing)
 - relatively low motivation in view of current economic climate and poor employment prospects but strong cultural 'group instincts' available, which can enable mutual stimulation of motivation
 - perception that English will not be required in the place of work: low motivation to learn English
 - average level of English: false-beginner (all four skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing)
 - experience mostly in grammar-translation methods
 - limited experience with communicative English
 - limited or no experience in using English with native speakers outside of school environment
 - initially easy to manipulate: open to introduction of unfamiliar methodology, etc.
 - require careful supervision to sustain efforts to complete project work
 - discussion work entirely in English perceived as an imposition: tasks will require careful planning.
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* Some of this information was obtained by a 'marketing study' (an unavailable, anecdotal report on the results of questionnaires distributed to local high schools) performed in preparation for establishing TBGU.

A number of the non-English teaching staff at TBGU are proficient users of English and are enthusiastic that English is a very important skill that our students should be encouraged to master. However, views appear to differ widely on the extent to which PM-oriented business-related English (i.e. as a kind of English for Special Purposes; ESP) should be emphasized, while many of the students themselves consider English as a Foreign Language to have a relatively low priority in their life (see Table 3). It is therefore clear that the *needs* driving the PM English courses require careful attention in order to try to pin down and clarify the course objectives.

Initially, it was decided that the English courses would be taught independently by the instructors assigned to them, and there was little co-ordination concerning the details of what the students were learning, in terms of either the skills on offer or the subject matter. Also, the previous experience of the majority of instructors was with students majoring in English at college level, often with a bias towards grammar or English Literature. It is clear, though, that a more integrated, practical approach is desirable. This can be realized

from (i) the theoretical issues of the learning of English and (ii) the information received as feedback elicited from the students: these form the subject of the present paper. Some of the recent changes have proven to be a giant paradigmatic shift for many instructors, but in the current academic year the curriculum has begun to swing well away from academic, grammatical and literary studies towards providing our students with some practical, marketable skills. The present paper discusses some of the steps involved in this process so far.

2. The basics of curriculum development

In designing a curriculum for English, there are two main points that need to be addressed: the philosophy of language learning that will drive it, and the curriculum aims and objectives.

2.1 A language learning philosophy for the English curriculum

There are many ways to achieve successful second language (L2) acquisition (SLA), so it is not possible to draw up a single profile of the successful learner, although some characteristics can be viewed as necessary conditions for successful learning: for example; “learners probably need at least a modicum of motivation to learn anything” (Ellis, 1994: 524). Current theories of the learning of a second language have been reviewed recently by Cotten and Gleadall (1998) and experience to date at TBGU suggests that the conclusions from that review are still relevant for the PM English course. These are briefly summarized below, with some of the key points italicized.

It had long been thought that languages were “best learned by limiting the language to which learners were exposed and practising it intensively” (Lewis, 1996: 16), and that “learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught” (Skehan, 1996: 18). However, among the conventional foreign language learners in schools, few achieve high levels of proficiency. Instructed learners certainly make faster progress than uninstructed learners, but “the elements of a language do not simply slot into place in a predictable order” (Skehan, 1996: 19). Lightbown (1998: 196) points out that: “a great deal of language acquisition will take place without focussed instruction and feedback, when learners are exposed to *comprehensible input* and opportunities for *meaningful interaction*”, although not all features of language can be acquired in this way.

The student population generally at TBGU has a low motivation for learning English (see Table 3), so as far as possible a hands-on, task-based approach appears to be appropriate and for most students it seems clear that efforts must be made to avoid presenting English *per se*, as an academic exercise. *Tasks* in English education are often thought of as pedagogical language-learning activities (see for example Nunan, 1989; Swaffar, 1991). In my view this is a loose, broad definition of limited practical use to the students at TBGU (which also the students seem to sense intuitively). However, in either a broad or narrow sense, (i) *meaning* is the primary focus of tasks, and (ii) success is evaluated in terms of achieving a clearly defined outcome, arrival at which involves (at least some resemblance to) real-life language use. In short, *focus on completion of a task involves learning-by-doing*, forcing the learner to acquire the necessary language skills needed to fulfil the task (Skehan, 1996: 20).

The following aspects of SLA are also under consideration during course design:-

1) Balancing the following factors when preparing tasks for learners: syntactic vs. lexical complexity and range; familiarity of material (enabling chunking or requiring new or less well organized language); abstract (e.g. making judgements; giving advice) vs. concrete (involving real-world referents, such as using money); the reasoning operations required (e.g. when collaborating to solve a riddle); degree of structuring (e.g. presence of inherent structuring because of the task: such as the beginning, middle & end required for a narrative; or description based on a clear underlying schema, such as a tour of a house); and learner styles (e.g. impulsive vs. reflective; intuitive-random vs. concrete-sequential; Oxford & Anderson, 1995).

2) The quality and quantity of the input to which learners are exposed (Lewis, 1996: 16). This should include *interactional features* (such as directives, expansion, and negotiation of misunderstandings) for *comprehensible input* (cf. Long's interaction hypothesis: Ellis, 1994: 286) and *learner output* (indirect feedback in the form of clarification requests, pushing learners to adjust, and thereby improve, their output; Ellis, 1994: 287).

3) Related to (2), policy (and extent) of use of the following: (i) the first (native) language ("L1") (see Ellis, 1994: 343; cf. Gleadall, 1993, 1994, 1996); (ii) English both in and outside the classroom; and (iii) monolingual dictionaries (suitably simplified editions).

4) *Extensive reading*. Students in high school in Japan generally have poor skills in reading. For example, students are often taught to read English sentences backwards to

facilitate translation into Japanese, and sometimes cannot cope even with the reading required for conversation classes. To practice reading skills, and to facilitate language learning, a program of extensive reading provides a large *comprehensible input* (e.g. Schmidt, 1998), with students required to read a large number of graded books during their two years of English studies. Students are encouraged to discern and choose materials and topics that are level-appropriate and interesting to them (cf. Sawyer, 1998).

5) *Vocabulary*. Input through reading or listening is only comprehensible if around 95% of the vocabulary is already known (Nation, 2001). Furthermore, for *fluency* practice, students should know 100% of the vocabulary being used (i.e. no new words). Students should therefore be required to work through a vocabulary list of about 2800 words (cf. West, 1953; Xue and Nation, 1984) available on the university computer network. The earlier (easier) parts of the list should be tested early in the course, and the latter parts presented in sections pre-empting vocabulary appearing during coursework within the subsequent 2-3 weeks (for consolidation). Once this vocabulary has been covered adequately, students should be encouraged to use *strategies for learning and consolidating new vocabulary*, then left to work on vocabulary outside classes.

6) Guidance in recognizing and using *learning strategies* (e.g. Ellis, 1994: 538; Thomas, 1996; Grenfell & Harris, 1998; Kato, 1998).

7) Opportunity to express *comprehensible output* (Swain, 1991; Russell & Loschky, 1998), which argues for a balance between receptive and productive skills across the curriculum.

8) Balancing the skills of speech processing (Table 4; see also Skehan, 1996: 22; Ketko, 2000), in terms of: (i) *accuracy* (the analytical emphasis); (ii) *complexity and restructuring* (the ability to balance the two modes of speech processing to meet new communicative challenges); and (iii) *fluency* (confident use of the lexical mode).

9) *Focus on form*. Focussing learners' attention on grammatical meanings in the context of actively communicating, rather than traditional grammar as forms in isolation ("formS"; Long, *vide* Doughty & Williams, 1998: 3; see also Long, 1983; Garrett, 1991; Higgs, 1991; VanPatten, 1991; Ellis, 1994: 659; Long & Robinson, 1998: 23; DeKeyser, 1998; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Doughty & Williams, 1998: 3). However, it is often difficult to know which features require focus on form and exactly when it should be offered (Lightbown, 1998: 195; Williams & Evans, 1998).

10) Study abroad for at least a few weeks, upon achieving criteria at the high intermediate level (cf. DeKeyser, 1991: 116).

Table 4. Summary and comparison of the lexical and analytical modes of speech processing.

	Lexical mode	Analytical mode
processing type	top-down	bottom-up
processing level	minimal: based on a large store of set phrases (for both speaking and listening): "chunking" (Lewis, 1996)	maximal: deals with new, unfamiliar words & phrases;
advantages	highly accessible; less thought required & less tiring	highly precise, rule-governed, providing potential to generate creative language
production	rapid, routine	slow, but tailor-made
conversation	fluent, based on immediate context or preceding discourse	accurate, but with long pauses (required for analysis)
disadvantages for the unimodal learner	long-term progress poor: does not use new phrases; repeats mistakes; development can fossilize	fluency poor: has difficulty holding a conversation at normal speed, especially with rapid topic changes; tires easily

2.2 Defining the curriculum aims and objectives

The target students have moderate, wide-ranging linguistic ability and motivation, so careful planning is required to provide appropriate encouragement and progress towards achieving the English-related goals of the university (Table 2) and subsequent successful completion of the resulting English program. The terms "aims" and "objectives" are used in the sense of Gronlund (1978): see also Johnson (1995). Basically, these are concise statements describing the syllabus, and using Gronlund's strict criteria are written concisely in terms of behaviour: what students can actually do upon successful completion. The style of writing is such that each aim or objective is understood to begin with the phrase: "On completion of the course/unit/class, the student will be able to: . . ." So-called "aims" and "goals" are statements of broad objectives for the course as a whole or for a particular course unit. An example of an aim is "communicate with foreign friends and visitors." An example of an objective for a particular class is: "write a business letter in a

standard format.”

The aims, goals and objectives of the curriculum should be arrived at after consideration from a number of different points of view, including those of: the university management and administration; the students themselves; the students' parents and relatives; the teaching staff; other people in the field the student is studying; and society in general. Each of these groups has a legitimate interest in the outcomes of the courses and has its own idea of how university education should proceed so, especially for a private establishment such as TBGU, it is wise to try to ascertain the expectations of all involved, to at least ensure optimum face validity for the PM English program.

The best way to inform a clear statement of the aims and objectives is to perform a needs analysis (NA), as outlined for example in Brindley (1989). To date, this has been done three times for the PM English course at TBGU. The findings of the most recent (July, 2001) will be reported in a subsequent paper. The first was performed just prior to the opening of TBGU, and the second at the end of the first two years. These are reported in the subsequent two sections. A summary of the aims of the English curriculum is presented in tabular form, but as yet a detailed bank of objectives is only partially complete and will be reported elsewhere.

3. Plans for the initial year at TBGU

In planning a new curriculum, a full range of tools (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, linguistic analyses) should be employed to obtain as much information as possible, to optimize the curriculum's chances of success. Initially, however, access to the prospective target population for NA was not possible, so the initial strategy was to use professional judgement and consider comparable populations: (i) students enrolled in the Dept. of Policy Management at Keio University, Tokyo (who, unfortunately, could not be polled in time for preparing the initial PM English curriculum at TBGU); (ii) English major undergraduates at another Japanese university (Cotten & Gleadall, 1998); and (iii) suitable data from other curriculum studies (Abey et al., 1983; Dubin & Olstain, 1986; Kimzin & Proctor, 1986; Power, 1986; Asahina & Okuda, 1987; Loschky et al., 1987; Asahina et al., 1988; Abe et al., 1996; Yoshida, 1997).

3.1 The first needs analysis

Despite perusing and considering material from a number of sources (Munby, 1978; Kimzin & Proctor 1986; Dubin & Olstain, 1986; Power, 1986; Yalden, 1987; Benesch, 1996; Yoshida, 1997), the NA's reported in the present paper were derived

Table 5. Summary of the findings of a needs analysis of English majors at a Japanese university.*

Students indicated preferences for

- English courses with a vocational component, one-to-one interaction and contemporary, useful content
- English with content relating to (in order of popularity) personal interests & hobbies > business > “everyday usage” > vocation-specific
- course assessment by regular, “easy” tests
- inclusion of discussion of cultural differences between Japan and The West
- more problem-solving tasks, working in groups
- classroom activities that involve movement
- writing about self, ideas and feelings
- placement in small classes with people of similar ability
- student input considered in decisions about courses
- opportunities to sit a recognized national or international test (TOEFL, TOEIC, etc.)
- employment in education, information services, office work, or the local civil service.

Students indicated aversion to

- artificial speaking activities, rather than genuine conversation & discussion
- following a ‘class reader’
- sitting in lectures
- studying grammar
- learning words by heart
- too much emphasis on drills & exercises
- materials that de-motivate (e.g. irrelevant to interests & needs; appear devised to ‘keep students busy’)
- writing personal letters, stories or poems.
- failure to deal with lazy students appropriately
- large enrollments for speaking or discussion courses
- homework assignments or exams that are too difficult or too easy

* Modified after Cotten & Gleadall (1998), with permission, omitting findings not relevant to TBGU.

Table 6A. A timetable for the Policy Management English Course.*

	Time	Mon.	Tue.	Weds.	Thurs.
Year 1, Term 1	0-45 min.	Success	Global News 1	LL	Communication 1
	46-90 min.	Fluency		Reading /Writing	
Year 1, Term 2	0-90 min.	Communication 2	Global News 2	LL	Communication 3
Year 2, Term 1	0-90 min.	Communication 4	Global News 3	Business Corresp.	Communication 5
Year 2, Term 2	0-90 min.	Project	Global News 4	Communication 6	[to be decided]

*(from an initial proposal that was not implemented; refer to text).

Explanatory notes. *Fluency*: Introduction to suprasegmental pronunciation, using an initial bank of English phrasal 'chunks' (cf. Ketko, 2000). *Global News*: lessons on international news topics, based around listening, discussion of vocabulary and translation of specialist phrases; see text. *LL*: Language laboratory (Year 2 students continue their own LL schedule, outside the regular timetable). *Reading/Writing*: Starter for extensive reading (300 pages minimum per year) and journal writing (60 pages min. per year). *Success*: Mini lectures in Learning Strategies (e.g. Nunan, 1989: 81-82; Swain, 1998) and Emotional ("EQ") Development (Goleman, 1995; Orr, 1998). *Themes for communication classes*: 1, Basic Functions; 2, Communication Strategies; 3, Numeracy; 4, Telephone Skills; 5 & 6, to be decided; [to be decided], final course content to be decided following input from other staff and/or students.

Table 6B. Proposed modes of assessing components of a Policy Management English Course.*

- *Business Correspondence*: formal written test at end of unit.
- *Communication*: pre- and post-testing, with frequent short tests covering all 4 skills. Audio journals, listening homework and extensive reading reports (after Term 1).
- *Extensive Reading*: written reports (on standard printed sheets; see Schmidt, 1998), to be submitted upon completion of each book. (From Term 2 of Year 1 onwards, this will be included as part of the assessment for one of the communication units).
- *Fluency*: formal pre-and post-testing.
- *Global News*: formal written test at end of each unit &/or written project assignment.
- *Success*: point system for punctuality of handing in assignments for all courses, and progress with vocabulary testing and with extensive reading schedule.
- *Vocabulary testing*: once per week (via university computer network), according to the schedule: vocabulary to learn provided in nth week, tested functionally in the (n+1)th week, to be used in lessons in the (n+2)th week.

*(from an initial proposal that was not implemented).

mostly from scratch and peer-revised. The first NA (Table 5) drew mainly on data from Cotten & Gleadall (1998), who performed a needs analysis on Japanese students at another university and graduates in employment in Fukushima Prefecture. Although these students were majors in English, their needs have proved to be quite close to those at TBGU. However, consideration of factors such as preferred learning strategies (Grenfell & Harris, 1998) and different learner styles and types (Goleman, 1995; Oxford & Anderson, 1995) will be left until later in the curriculum development process.

3.2 An initial outline for a PM English curriculum

Arising from this first NA, a curriculum organization was proposed in outline (Table 6A, B). Unfortunately, there was insufficient opportunity to discuss this proposed curriculum during the initial hiring of staff and the setting up of the university, so this scheme was never instigated. However, a number of the components have now been introduced (e.g. extensive reading), and others are under consideration.

Since it is well known that the human attention span reaches its limits after a maximum of around 50 min., it was envisaged that English classes would be organized in short, concentrated, intensive units of two back-to-back 40 min. classes, with a 10-min. break, 4 times a week. The syllabus was also organized to quickly wean students away from the typical translation-type, exam-oriented lessons of high school towards objectives related to communication and functioning in the world of work. Some emphasis on functioning in a computer-oriented working environment was planned, with relaxed (but effective) supervision in areas such as vocabulary testing and extensive reading. The Global News block reflects course objectives relating to culture and dealing with international current affairs (Table 2). Objectives regarding international tests of English were not addressed directly, since this specialization was regarded as too much to do within the time available to fit into the main two-year English course.

Note that there was little or no attempt to dictate the balance of skills across the curriculum, because it was felt that the skills should be integrated within the classes (but see §4.2, below). However, since the initial intake of 124 students was to be placed into three groups, in allocating the students an attempt was made to screen the students roughly into classes of three different levels. Because there was most worry about differences in speaking/listening ability, screening was done by a simple listening/speaking exercise in the language laboratory.

4. Changes after the first two years

During the first two years, it became obvious that changes were necessary, especially since little progress had been made in co-ordinating the syllabuses of the 12 obligatory units in English (four classes per week for three semesters). Because different staff had taught on different parts of the course, the three groups of students progressing through the curriculum were by no means covering the same things to the same degree. (The initial attempts at placement of the students into one of three levels were of limited success).

4.1 The second needs analysis and first curriculum evaluation

A second NA was performed in July 2000 (Table 7) and a comprehensive curriculum evaluation began in Autumn 2000. The NA took the form of an exit survey, which highlighted the fact that there is a very wide range of views amongst the student population. Some students detest English, and find their heavy load of obligatory English classes annoying. Other students deemed English to be very important, and they approach classes with enthusiasm and enjoyment.

Evaluation began with all the English staff writing down a week-by-week summary of their lesson plans, which were collated into a 54-page document (for English courses across the university). Copies were then circulated among all the staff and comments were elicited by asking for answers to the following questions: (i) What do we expect that students will be able to do in English on completing each unit? (ii) Do the syllabuses match these expectations? (iii) Are there any overlaps, inconsistencies or omissions among the component syllabuses? (iv) Is there a good balance of the four basic skills? (v) What self-criticisms or doubts do you have (e.g. about the courses you are teaching in general, or the textbook(s) you are using)?

The aims of this evaluation were: (1) Review and evaluate present English courses; (2) Plan and co-ordinate present and future English courses; (3) Present incoming part-time staff with more specific objectives for their teaching; and (4) Make recommendations for teaching loads and amount of part-time teaching required for the following year.

Table 7. Results of the second needs analysis.

On Policy Management course in general . . . *

- Marking on exams is too strict
- Reports/assignments are preferable to basing everything entirely on tests
- We mistakenly thought that getting credits was simple
- Policy Management is a wide field but we feel the course at TBGU is too wide
- Too many subjects to study in Policy Management
- Provide more classes leading to recognized qualifications (e.g. TOEIC; personal computer usage)

On English classes . . . *

- Too difficult
- O.K.
- Interesting
- Do class without a textbook, just dialogue with the teacher
- Use more Japanese
- Not enough time to speak with the teacher
- Do more conversation
- Do more listening
- Use a slow-speed tape recorder
- Tell us more about the U.K. (topics of conversation)
- Teacher: speak more slowly: misunderstandings sometimes meant homework was not done appropriately
- To learn English conversation quickly, please test us on pronunciation, stress and rhythm

Staff comments . . .

- Poor emphasis on writing
 - Too much of the curriculum is grammar-based
 - Low levels of student ability, motivation and application
 - Poor co-ordination among classes
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*Summarized from comments elicited from students completing English III (July, 2000).

Table 8. Aims of the English curriculum.*

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- extend English learned at high-school, emphasizing weak points in the four skills
 - apply and use English, rather than merely possess knowledge of a set of grammar rules
 - acquire command of 'living', 'useful' English
 - acquire confidence and proficiency in using English with computing skills
 - give examples of cultural differences between Japan and other countries
 - use English texts as a basis for discussing & comparing Japanese and Western societies
 - establish and maintain communications in English with students in other countries
 - organize own schedule efficiently to fulfill unit assignments thoroughly and punctually
 - become accustomed to studying predominantly in English, collaborating in pairs or small groups
 - use English to confirm, clarify and query staff about required tasks
 - demonstrate proficiency in (i) basic listening tasks, (ii) listening comprehension, (iii) basic conversation, (iv) basic reading comprehension, & (v) basic writing skills
 - demonstrate basic reading comprehension of English language newspapers and magazines in small, intensive classes
 - retain at least 50% of phrases acquired from a bank of spoken English forms
 - demonstrate functional use of at least 50% of the target vocabulary bank
 - demonstrate comprehension of taped items of international news
 - understand the gist of requests made by native speakers when confronted one-to-one
 - accomplish simple tasks using the telephone
 - demonstrate rhythm, stress and timing closer to English than to Japanese
 - speak at a speed approaching 100 words per minute
 - give appropriate answers that can be understood by a native English speaker
 - negotiate meaning by appropriate strategies
 - state own opinions on current issues in conversations with a native English speaker
 - develop the habit of keeping a journal in English
 - demonstrate mastery of strategies for actively learning English
 - demonstrate proficiency in a national or international test (e.g. TOEIC)
 - study English further, independently
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*Based on a translation from an administrative document written in Japanese, with further additions by myself in the light of results of subsequent needs analyses and observations of PM classes.

4.2 The current PM English curriculum

One of the findings from the curriculum evaluation was a lack of focus on writing and listening skills. Therefore, the classes that began in April 2001 were drastically re-organized according to the four skills, and further changes are certain next year in the light of a more extensive exit survey performed in July 2001. An updated working draft summarizing the aims of the English curriculum is shown in Table 8.

5. Future developments

5.1 Initial proposals for a new English curriculum

Recognizing the usefulness of focussing on tasks rather than language itself, evaluation of the English curriculum towards the end of the year 2000 saw the concept of tasks begin to acquire a dominant role in guiding future curriculum design, particularly for the PM courses. In view of the positive responses gained from student feedback, along with basic intuitive feelings that the narrow definition of tasks is the most appropriate, *tasks* are viewed not in terms of pedagogical tools but as concrete manifestations of the skills with which we hope to equip our students for their working life. So, for example, in current PM classes teaching writing skills it has been stipulated that students will not be required to write academic compositions in English, but they will be provided with guidance in writing standard business letters while being set a target of speed and accuracy in typing (a challenging but achievable task). Most students take a positive view of learning to type because they can see the practical use of keyboard typing skills that can be transferred to other academic subjects outside English studies (in addition to their usefulness in working life). Also, during typing classes, students are exposed to a wide variety of comprehensible input in the form of dictations and the copying of genuine English texts, thus improving their English listening and reading skills in addition to dealing with problems of grammar by providing numerous models (e.g. in the form of business letter models that, again, have a clear practical use in the world of work).

The use of a task-based approach will hopefully prove optimal for learning, in view of recent comments and discussions of syllabus organization which suggest that this is the best approach (e.g. Nunan, 1989; Long, 1990; Robinson, 1998), particularly for our students. However, a large disadvantage is that there seems to be very little in the way of (truly) task-based textbooks or literature describing the kind of tasks ('target tasks;' Long,

Table 9. Points to consider in evaluating the curriculum.*

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- Have the curriculum objectives been translated into action?
 - Has the program so far reflected the findings of the needs analysis?
(Reassess data from the needs analysis).
 - Is the required learning taking place in relation to what was planned?
What have the students learned?
What have they failed to learn?
What have students learned that was not planned?
(Review results of testing at course entry & exit; i.e. pre- & post-testing).
 - Are there any overlaps, inconsistencies or omissions among the component syllabuses?
 - Is there a good balance of the four skills?
 - Do resources and administrative decisions constrain realization of the curriculum objectives?
How have resources been utilized?
What are the deficiencies?
What is redundant?
(Recommend changes).
 - Further input from continuing needs analysis data and course exit surveys.
 - Review philosophy, goals, objectives, courses and recommend changes where necessary.
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*Summarized from various sources.

1990: 35) that are suitable for classroom use: in my opinion, 'contrived' tasks, especially those purely pedagogic in nature, are highly likely to fail with our students. It will therefore be up to the teaching staff to devise most of the tasks afresh, based on students' real or perceived needs and interests. This is a considerable 'task' in itself, but one worth spending time on in view of its central importance (Long, 1990: 34).

5.2 Continuing needs analysis and evaluation

It is planned that the Internet web sites generated by the English staff will eventually include links to a bank of surveys to be used for NA and course evaluation feedback by the students. It is also intended that visitors (especially current high school students) to the university's home page will be encouraged to complete a needs analysis survey to enable course designers to become aware of any new trends in student

requirements in time to adjust the curriculum. This will probably prove to be an important strategy, as successful competition for the rapidly dwindling Japanese student population will be very important for the university to establish itself and remain competitive. Periodic evaluation of the curriculum is already in progress, and is performed using the guidelines summarized in Table 9.

6. Conclusions

Construction of the English curriculum is as yet far from complete. According to some authors, this is natural, especially since input from the learners (which should provide considerable input towards defining the curriculum) has only recently become available. This means that a number of major changes are likely in the near future. Subsequent papers will focus on different aspects of the evolving curriculum in more detail.

As stated in the Introduction, one of the biggest problems with the current curriculum is that it only caters for the first- and second-year students. Presently there is the problem of how to motivate students to maintain an interest in developing their English skills. This problem would be far less serious if there were an English component available in the third and fourth years. Currently, the curriculum throughout the Faculty of Policy Management is under review, and a more even distribution of the English curriculum throughout the degree course is one of the points under close scrutiny for change. There are a number of sound reasons why such changes are advisable. Most importantly, the students themselves are dissatisfied with the current balance of English studies. Some students go so far as to demand that English should be a purely elective course, with no compulsory component. This goes against the aims of the course and of the university (cf. Tables 2 & 8). Although such aims should not be regarded as immutable, it is the opinion of this author that a recognition of the importance of English for PM students in the world of work is justified, and that the experience and knowledge of the students is likely to be too limited for them to make an informed choice that they would not regret later in life. However, in view of the wide range in student enthusiasm and ability in English, there is a consensus among the English teaching staff that some form of self-access component should be incorporated. The results of a third NA have provided us with a mandate to pursue this avenue, and the introduction of self-access English classes is currently one of the major reforms taking place across all Faculties here at TBGU.

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