

A Report on the 1981 Summer Course at the University of Reading*

by

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0. Introduction

I was very lucky to have had an opportunity to participate in an eight week summer course at CALS (the Centre for Applied Language Studies) in Reading University and a two-week individual study programme in Great Britain.*** In fact I got excited when I received the news that I was selected as one of the participants of this course, which is specially commissioned for the Japanese university teachers of English.

1. Preliminaries

First I have something to say about the procedures of participating in this course. It was not clear how and what to prepare to participate in it. For example, I did not know that it was possible for me to depart from Osaka International Airport, or that both JAL (Japan Air Lines) and BA (British Airways) are available to go to England, although JAL seems to be more recommended by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (the Mombusho). Nor did I know whether we should get a ticket to England individually or in a group although this programme has been continuing for as many as six years. The Mombusho should have been more kind to the participants in many ways so that we do not have any unnecessary anxiety or trouble.

The British Council gave us much information about this programme. But I did not think that it was adequate or full enough, for some of us (including me) were not familiar with the procedures of going to England. So we should have been given much more basic and exact information first.

You might suppose that such information is not so important, but it is quite important and even essential. In fact the details of the schedule differ completely according to the amount of information acquired, especially for persons living in rural cities far from Tokyo.

What I wanted to know more about was the contents of the course, and sure enough the contents we had were rather different from those which I had expected from the brochure distributed by the Mombusho and the information sent from the British Council.

As to the two-week individual study programme, it was impossible to make an exact

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*** I would like to express my gratitude to the Mombusho and the British Council for giving me such an opportunity to study English in the United Kingdom.

The participants of this course, incidentally, were as follows :

Yasuo Ichikawa, Shigeo Inamochi, Shigeaki Kotera, Kiyoshi Masukawa, Masao Matsuyama, Kunihiro Nagasawa, Shoko Senda, Shinichi Shigihara, Katsunobu Sunagawa, Jun Yamada,

plan since I did not know the real purpose of this although the Mombusho asked us to submit the plan in a hurry. We should have been informed that it is intended for us to become familiar with the background of English teaching, English culture, etc., by travelling around the UK, for instance.

Talking of the University of Reading, we know about many famous linguists such as F. R. Palmer (English grammar and English linguistics), D. Crystal (language pathology and therapy, stylistic analysis and intonation), P. Trudgill (sociolinguistics and dialectology) at the Department of Linguistic Science, Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences as well as D. A. Wilkins (second language learning), director of CALS. As Jon Roberts was saying, the Department of Linguistic Science is one of the three most famous in Britain.

What I did not know when it was very important, however, was that CALS is 'an autonomous unit within the department specialising in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.' This virtually means that CALS, directly, has almost nothing to do with the Department of Linguistic Science. So, contrary to our expectations, we never had classes of English linguistics. In that sense I must say that I felt rather betrayed and discouraged about the course.

2. Life in Reading

We arrived at Heathrow Airport at 6.45 on the morning of 4 July. We felt a little uneasy to know that the temperature outside was only 11°C. It was too cool, especially for us who had come from Japan where it is very hot in summer.

There were no problems on entering Britain nor on my way to the course centre thanks to the kind and good information the British Council and CALS had sent us.

From Heathrow Airport we took a bus to Reading, whose fare was three pounds each. We enjoyed the green and beautiful scenery from the windows of the bus, which seemed to show that British people are living comfortably off, although it is reported that the UK is not in a good financial state.

When we arrived at Bridges Hall in Reading University, we were met by Jon Roberts, our course leader, and were invited to his home to have a coffee with his family. And the following evening Jon invited us to the pub called 'The Bull Inn' on the River Thames, which was a good introduction to life in England. We were very happy that he was nice and kind throughout the course.

For the first four weeks of the course, we stayed in Bridges Hall and for the second four weeks we stayed individually in a host family near the University. I think I had a very good experience since I was able to see and enjoy both sides of life in England, i. e. campus life and family life. This pattern of accommodation should be kept for coming years. It is true that I felt it troublesome to move from the Hall to the family in the middle of the course, but I must say that, thanks to that, I was able to experience the real life in England.

In the Hall, we were provided with three meals a day, and it was a new experience for me. And there we had chances to communicate with students of various nationalities.

In my host family there were two children and I learned authentic English even from those children. By this what we call 'home-stay' I came to understand (at least) part of British family life, in particular, how English parents discipline and educate their own children at home. Everything was new to me, and it was a valuable experience for me, so I am satisfied with the accommodation in Reading. There were no problems about it.

3. Contents of the Course and Some Observations

3.0 General Survey of the Course

The distribution of time of the course were as follows (Table 1):

Table 1 Distribution of Time

		week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	total
Language Practice	listening activity		8	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	communication activity		1	2	0	1	4	3	0	3	14
Description of English	cohesion in English		5	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
	varieties of English		0	0	3	2	4	2	3	0	14
Applied Linguistics	applied linguistics 1 & 2*		0	0	11	8	0	0	0	0	19
	communicative language teaching		1	2	2	0	5	5	7	2	24
Britain Now	current trends		3	6	0	2	1	0	4	2	18
Individual Project Study			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
total			18	20	16	13	14	10	14	10	115

* 1) Aspects of Discourse Analysis

2) Syllabus Design

Simply calculated, we had about three hours of classes a day because the total hours of classes we had were 115 and we had classes for forty days [5 (days a week) × 8 (weeks) = 40 (days)]. So this course was not severe, but was very suitable. The rest of the hours during the course were spent in the main for both the 'school excursions' that were organized by CALS and the 'private study.' It was very good that we had more private study hours than the last year's course.

3.1 Listening Activity

Among various aspects of the learning of English, listening comprehension is the most important and difficult for us who learn it as a foreign language. So it was very nice of CALS to have given us listening activity training intensively at earlier stages of the course.

Among the material used were BBC news of the day or the previous day, and interview (style) recordings of some manual workers, which are typical examples of authentic English. But it is often true that I had much difficulty in following them. Since the ability of listening comprehension of the participants varies from person to person, I propose that this activity of the course should be organized individually so that we can proceed at our own paces. All they should do is present varieties of material to us, and we should try to listen to what we want to according to our own ability, interest, and so forth.

This activity was so difficult that someone was referring to this as 'the listening of terror.' It was a great shock, in fact, to find that at first I was not able to understand much of what the tapes were saying. And still worse, I sometimes did not manage to identify what they were saying even as I was looking at the script. I keenly realised that we should definitely improve the ability of listening comprehension, for nothing is so important as this in whatever communicative situations we may be.

3.2 Communication Activity

Most of the classes were carried out in the form of role-playing by which it is meant that

everyone of us is supposed to play a part in classwork. Being divided into some small groups, for instance, we played cards, played with pictures or blocks, and discussed some problems such as traffic situations in England without using Japanese.

To describe one of the easy examples of this activity, it will be as follows :

There are prepared two pictures on the table which differ from each other in small parts, and the two learners in pair try to guess the differences between those pictures through oral communication without looking at each partner's.

That is, learners are put in a position to speak and communicate in English, and their English is supposed to improve by so doing. Or they are imposed on work which can not be carried out without communicating to each other in pairs or in small groups. This seems to be based on the idea 'Let's improve our English by playing in English.'

But these classes were too practical and often not so effective. Since we are not native speakers of English, it is very difficult and sometimes even impossible to judge whether or not our English is correct and natural. In order to make these classes better and more effective, it is hoped, each group should be supplied with (at least) one native speaker of English as an assistant so that we can ask anything about English anytime. Also, when it comes to applying such group work methods in the teaching of English in Japan, I am afraid the class size in Japanese schools is too large to do so. I think it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for such teaching devices to work properly and smoothly.

3. 3 Cohesion in English

Every language has various kinds of cohesion such as the relations between pronouns and their references, and between nouns and their alternative expressions. It is true so far that there has been a tendency for the study of English to be focused on the sentence level. But English must be studied on the discourse level as well since one of the important factors to understand the real and subtle meanings of the sentences or paragraphs of English is obviously the semantic network of words that are interwoven in the text.

Pauline Robinson stressed the importance of context, semantic implication, and so on by giving us some typical examples from the literature of contemporary English. Her lectures were very good and convincing. But her way of teaching seemed to be best suited to native speakers or advanced students of English, who can already understand and speak English, although that might be good for checking understanding in classes of English as a foreign language. But I do not think that stressing cohesion in English too much is so good a way to teach it, for the reason that such an analysis is not always suitable for beginners.

English sentences, in this connection, can be understood if we read the text carefully. So extracting cohesive elements mechanically is not a good task to impose upon learners. Even discourse reference, one of the cohesive functions which represents (the contents of) the preceding sentence, is not new to us, for it has been treated even in a traditional 'school grammar,' if not so systematically.

3. 4 Varieties of English

The first two classes on varieties of English were given by Malcolm Petyt, a guest speaker from outside CALS. He presented us with nice introductory lectures on them. In fact, he was the most interesting and nice guest speaker that CALS invited.

Ron White, director of courses, gave us nice lectures, seminars and workshops on varieties in contemporary English. His sources were from papers (such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Sun*, etc.), notices, advertisements, and so on. He is a magician in that he can turn everything available in daily life in the UK into good material for his classes.

Such classes of his were those which I had expected to have, for they provided us with good material which is available for classes on English teaching and English linguistics in Japan. In fact, I am going to make use of some of the material in my English classes at the University. Generally speaking, lectures on varieties of English were very relevant to my current teaching commitments.

Varieties involve many aspects of language—style, register, dialect, etc., and sociolinguistics has much to do with those aspects. But even English teachers, in Japan, do not seem to have enough knowledge about these subtle problems when they are very important in the teaching of English. It is absolutely necessary that we should deepen our understanding of those aspects of English.

Ron White is 'an experienced teacher' and he really carried out his classes very systematically and punctually. But I must point out that even his lectures did not cover all the ranges that I had expected to learn about.

3. 5 Applied Linguistics 1 & 2

As D. A. Wilkins, director of CALS, is very famous internationally in the field of applied linguistics, it was very exciting and stimulating that he himself gave us lectures, seminars and workshops intensively on it for two weeks.

Applied linguistics has a wide range of coverage, so the contents of his classes during the course were limited in the main to the theories of 'speech acts' and 'topics and focuses' in English sentences. I do not necessarily think, however, that he did his best, for he was just relaxing in his classes when he had much more to teach us about. He seemed to be suggesting in a sense that we should read his own books on applied linguistics if we are interested in it. In fact he has written already some books about it which are very influential to many English teachers in the world.

3. 6 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Mostly Jon Roberts and sometimes Ed Williams, Steve Andrews, Gill Sturtridge and others by turns gave us lectures, seminars and workshops on communicative language teaching (CLT).

CLT is comparatively a new trend in language teaching. English teaching (in Japan) so far has been mainly based on the 'Grammar Translation Method' and how to communicate in English has been neglected in classwork. As a result of it, pupils who learned English by this method or in like manner were not able to develop their communicative competence as teachers had expected they would. To avoid this defect, we might learn the theory of CLT, for it seems to be a kind of reaction to that teaching method stressing grammatical accuracy.

But, to tell the truth, most of the classes were too practical and sometimes too trivial for me. And the atmosphere of the classes was rather lazy and boring. The problem was why they spent so much time for that, although I do understand the importance of the idea of CLT and I do not deny that having those classes was a new experience for me. My honest impression, therefore, is that those classes can and should be carried out much more effectively and systematically.

Jon Roberts stressed the importance of CLT, but in English teaching we should not stress one approach too much rather than the other. Both of them should be well-balanced, i. e. both accuracy and communicability should be aimed at. In this connection, one of the problems in English teaching in Japan is that it does not seem to get improved so much just by adopting such a communicative approach. Thus I cannot help saying that more serious problems to be solved are involved in it.

3. 7 Britain Now

CALS presented us with various lectures on 'Britain Now.' They prepared a number of lectures and guest speakers. The following are the titles of the lectures and in the parentheses are shown, respectively, the names of the lecturers :

- 1) Introduction to 'Britain Now' (Jon Roberts)
- 2) History of Reading (Jeanette Martin)
- 3) The National Trust (Alistair Roach)
- 4) Education—Current Trends (Ray Davies)
- 5) Family Life (Ron White)
- 6) Contemporary English Literature (J. P. Parrinder)
- 7) Youth Training and Opportunities (Ray Mannings)
- 8) Local Politics (Charles Sutcliffe)
- 9) Boarding Games (Donn Byrne)
- 10) Control of Universities (Ray Buss)
- 11) Race Relations (D. Cooper)

I am not going to mention these lectures much. Some of them were nice, but some were not. Some of the lecturers, it seemed, were not well prepared. I think every lecturer should prepare his or her handout so that we can understand them better if they are going to give us lectures worthy of the name at all. Also, CALS should ask what we would like to know about or what topics we are interested in.

3. 8 Individual Project Study

The purpose of the individual project study was to do something according to our own interest whilst taking the advantage of our being in Reading. This is a kind of assignment imposed upon each of us individually. And we had to orally present the result of our study at the final sessions of the course. But this was a bolt from the blue and I was at a loss to decide what to do and so were most of the participants.

If I had known the purpose and nature of this in advance, I could have prepared and brought some material and data from Japan with me. Anyway I had to spend much time to think about what to take up as the theme for a long time. This really had been a very big constant problem to me for as many as six weeks, most of my 'private study' time thus being spent for the preparations of this project study.

Although I roughly decided to take up one of the problems of futurity in English after thinking for two weeks, it was after a long while that I was able to decide what specific problem to take up and how to deal with it.

Since English has various forms of expressing futurity, I wanted to know how these expressions are used properly by native speakers of English. That is, the purpose of my project study was to clarify (part of) the native intuition of English futurity, for it is a very important problem in English teaching.

In order to do this I decided to make a research about 'the degree of certainty' that each form of futurity has. Obviously it is one of the important clues that are relevant to the understanding of the nature of English futurity. So I made a questionnaire about it and collected data to make this point clear. After examining the data, I successfully managed to make an oral presentation at the final sessions of the course.

3. 9 School Excursions

It was very nice of CALS to have organised many excursions for us. We visited :

- 1) Stratford-on-Avon and the Royal Shakespeare Company (*Winter's Tale*) [18 July]

- 2) London : Covent Garden, The National Portrait Gallery and the National Theatre (*The Caretaker* by Harold Pinter) [22 July]
- 3) Bath and Avebury [26 July]
- 4) Goring and Streatley—an evening trip to pubs on the River Thames [28 July]
- 5) London : The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew [7 August]
- 6) Eton College and Windsor Castle [12 August]
- 7) Mapledurham—a cruise on the River Thames [19 August]

About excursions 1) to 4), we went with the French group. More than twenty French English teachers were studying English at CALS during that time. But one thing that discouraged us was that we did not manage to go to the Houses of Parliament and see the inside of them, and that the excursion to Winchester was cancelled. It was very disappointing that the former was off, for I was looking forward to it even before I departed Japan. All the excursions were nice, and above all I liked Stratford-on-Avon, Bath and London ('Kew Gardens' in particular).

4. Individual Study

From 28 August to 4 September, six of us went to the Lake District, Scotland and York. We travelled around England and Scotland by two rent-a-cars. This was the highlight of our stay in the UK. But I will not mention here how we spent and enjoyed the eight days, for a detailed description of this will make another report, so let it suffice to say that we enjoyed every minute of it.

We came back to Reading after that and I stayed in London for ten days from 4 September to 13 September. During my stay there, although I had to spend much time preparing for coming back to Japan, I was able to visit some places of interest such as :

Covent Garden, London Transport Museum, Tower of London, London Bridge (which was under repair at that time, so I did not take any photos of this to my regret), CLIT library (the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research, British Council), British Museum, Regent Park, Harrods, Hyde Park, Buckingham Palace, The Mall, St. James Park, Green Park, etc.

In London I stayed in a bed and breakfast, for which I had booked before I departed Japan. The price of the accommodation was four pounds a day, which was very reasonable. This B & B was near Parsons Green on the District Line. My stay in London was rather short, but this greatly helped me understand the background of English and English culture.

5. Suggestions for This Programme to be Improved

Here I will mention some suggestions honestly so that (the contents of) this programme should be improved for the next year.

1) We are not necessarily familiar with the procedures of going abroad, and it is very difficult to get information about them, especially for persons living in rural cities as I do. It is undeniable that I was completely devoid of information. Since this programme has been continuing for six years from 1976, you should send much more information to the participants in advance, for it is obvious that the sooner they get the information, the more useful and convenient it will be to them.

2) According to the brochure of this programme, it was supposed that there are lectures on English phonetics, stylistics, sociolinguistics, and so on, but there were no such lectures that are at least worthy of the name. Although there were some classes in which some

problems of those disciplines were touched on more or less, they did not meet my expectations.

Most of the classes instead were too practical, and the contents were so poor that I practically did not learn so much from them as I had expected. Someone was complaining about it and was saying that 'private study' would be much better, for we can spend our time more significantly on our own.

Since I am quite interested in English teaching (in Japan), I do not deny the value of having attended this summer course. Any experience in the UK, on the contrary, will be useful in one way or another for the teaching of English. What I would like to say here, however, is that the contents of the course were quite different from what we had expected. I prefer to learn something more theoretical. Such being the case, I must say that the contents of the course did not quite correspond to my expectations.

3) Before the departure from Japan, I did not know much about CALS. So I was naively looking forward to being able to have lectures on linguistics at the University of Reading. But CALS is designed in the main for teachers and students who want to improve his or her practical ability of English. I wanted to learn English at the Department of Linguistic Science, Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences. So I suggest that you should arrange for the participants to be able to have classes from the linguists of that department.

Also, I suggest that the purpose of the individual project study should be known to them in much more detail before they depart Japan so that they can prepare (to decide) what they should do in Reading. I think that will save them much time and energy in Reading.

4) I think the level of English of the participants was rather advanced, but the ability of listening comprehension is not so good as teachers at CALS might have supposed. That is obviously the common weak point of Japanese learners of English. To tell the truth, there were some lectures that I was not able to understand much. Most of the lecturers spoke too fast. They seemed to be overestimating our ability of listening comprehension. It may be important for us to get used to English that is spoken at a natural speed, but it is still more important for us to understand lectures precisely and correctly. So I suggest that they should treat us with discretion in classwork at least at earlier stages of the course.

6. Conclusion

We were very happy on the final day of the course, when we had a diploma which proves that we have finished a course in 'Applied Linguistics, English Language and Cultural Studies.' To say nothing of making most use of the results of the course in my own English classes in Japan, I will develop a new effective way and philosophy of English teaching in my own way from now on.

Although some of the teachers in CALS, say, D. A. Wilkins, R. White are very experienced in English teaching and they seemed to be enjoying and relaxing whilst teaching. But most of them are rather young and they do not have enough experience. Also, I should hope that they will have much more knowledge about the present situation of English teaching in Japan.

As I mentioned already, the contents of the course were too practical, so it is best for the course to last for three weeks. I should think that it is impossible for them to keep us fresh throughout no less than eight weeks. But I admit that every one of them is a very nice person and in fact they were so serious and eager to teach good English to us. I think and hope that, in five years or so, CALS will be much more influential in English teaching, and that the day will come soon when it will be a Mecca of English teaching or applied

linguistics in the world.

By participating in this course, incidentally, I quite understand our Japanese English is understood very well at least on the level of communicability. I did not know that English has so many varieties according to age, sex, person, class, region, etc. Since our Katakana English, one of the regional varieties, is clearly understandable to English people, we should be, in a way, more confident with our own neutral and bookish Japanese English. But as for listening, it is absolutely necessary for us to get used to varieties of English, for we cannot understand them even when they can understand us. Also, we participants were able to deepen our mutual understanding to one another, which will be very useful for our academic studies especially in that we can exchange our information about English teaching from now on.

I am so busy now and I cannot afford to spend much time to write this report, so this is so to speak an interim report, but I think I have presented most of what I have to say. I do know very well that I am not in a position to complain and that it is very true that they cannot satisfy every one of us a hundred percent, and yet I have not hesitated to give very severe comments here on the belief that that is for the sake of CALS.

Generally speaking, I should say that the degree of satisfaction for the course was 80 percent. It was good on the whole and my stay in Britain was very nice, useful, satisfactory and enjoyable in spite of the above-mentioned severe statements.

Finally, since I liked Great Britain very much, I hope I can come back to study more about English, English culture, English people, and everything about the UK to say nothing of English linguistics, English phonetics and applied linguistics.

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