Abstract

This paper describes a pragmatic approach to teaching English conversation to Japanese university students. It introduces students to a variety of pragmatic strategies that will help them sound more natural in English and help avoid being negatively interpreted or misunderstood by native speakers of English due to different notions of how to cooperatively build conversations. Section two of the paper describes the basic content and activities of the textbook used. Section three explains how the textbook materials have been adapted and supplemented with handouts on the Cooperative Principle, pragmatic strategies, and English aizuchi training. In section four, after a brief discussion of the Immediate Method (IM), the modified IM approach adapted for this course is described, including the assessment of small-group speaking tests and the types of observations and feedback generated. The paper concludes with suggestions for improving the course by the integration of politeness strategies since they are central to the achievement of successful, cooperative communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2006 I have taught an introductory course designed to foster greater pragmatic awareness of the differences between spoken English and Japanese (Mosher, 2010; Mosher 2012) in the belief that knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary alone is insufficient for the development of communicative competence (Tanaka, 2006). This course, however, focuses primarily on the instruction of common speech act sets; e.g., compliments, requests and refusals. More recently, however, I have developed a course in English conversation that takes a rather different approach to developing pragmatic ability and awareness.

Pragmatics is an area of linguistics that focuses on the study of meaning as communicated by speakers (or writers) and interpreted by listeners (or readers). It is interested in speaker meaning, meaning in context, how more gets communicated than said and how speakers communicate physical, social or conceptual closeness (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics, as opposed to semantics, is not purely interested in the literal or abstract dictionary meaning of utterances, but in the intended meanings of words in context. Thomas (1995, 1998) states there are three levels of linguistic meaning: abstract or dictionary meaning, contextual or utterance meaning, and force or intended meaning. The second two levels are speaker level meaning. At the first level, listeners (or readers) must use context to assign the correct sense or reference to each word. At the second level, they need to assign the correct force or intended meaning.

Explaining how speakers communicate more than they say is not a simple task. To attempt to do so,
pragmatic researchers have studied a range of topics including, deixis, reference, inference, presupposition, entailment, cooperation, implicature, speech acts and events, preference structure and politeness (Yule, 1996; Koizumi, 2001). Using course materials that focus on speech acts, or more broadly the functional level of meaning, is one way of helping students more fully understand how English is used to communicate. The pragmatic approach to teaching English conversation explained here, however, takes a different approach: it introduces students to a variety of pragmatic strategies that effect how naturally students sound, and which help them to avoid being negatively interpreted or misunderstood by native English speakers. The basic pragmatic underpinning for these strategies is the Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996; Shimizu, 2009), which Rose and Kasper (2001) describe as a basic orientation to social cohesiveness and communicative action.

Section two of this paper describes the basic content and activities of the textbook used. Section three explains how the textbook materials have been adapted and supplemented with handouts on the Cooperative Principle, pragmatic strategies, and English aizuchi training. In section four, after a brief discussion of the Immediate Method (IM), the modified IM approach adapted for this course is described, including the assessment of small-group speaking tests and the types of observations and feedback generated. Finally, I summarize what I have learned from this approach to teaching English conversation and ways to strengthen and improve the course.

2. TEXTBOOK OVERVIEW

The textbook, Conversations in Class (CiC) (Richman & Vannieu, 2009), has two types of units. There are ten regular units centered on basic everyday conversation topics and two special units that introduce students to communication style and pragmatic differences between English and Japanese, as well as introduce them to pragmatic strategies that will help make their conversations more natural.

2.1 CiC Regular Units

The ten regular units cover the following topics: introductions; daily routines; university life; sports, music and study skills; family; travel; free time; part-time work and spending habits; hometown weather, holidays and food; and future plans and dreams. Each unit is separated into three two-page topically linked sections. Each section begins with a Toolbox that introduces grammatical structures for the lesson. Toolboxes contain two or more questions and several possible replies. Several words or phrases are linked to vocabulary boxes which allow students to easily vary the topical content of the questions and answers to fit their interests and life styles. There is also an audio track in English and Japanese for the toolbox available both on CD and as free podcasts. In the audio source, a native speaker first says the English sentences, followed by a Japanese speaker’s translation and usage tips.

On the second page, there is a model dialog that can be used for pronunciation practice as well as to provide students with ideas for how to use the toolbox structures in their own conversations. Some sections include a brief Sounding Natural Note that provide students with pragmatic strategies to make their conversational practice more appropriate. Students are then asked to write their own open questions (e.g., Where are you from?) and closed questions (e.g., Are you from Hiroshima?) on the lesson topic, as well as to write a few sentences about themselves. Having students prepare to speak
using three different patterns based on the core Toolbox structures helps them avoid unnatural or boring conversations. If, for example, students used primarily closed questions in their conversation, it would sound more like an interview than a conversation, or worse yet an interrogation. Finally, there is a short listening exercise that, in addition to giving students some listening practice, provides them with more ideas for using the Sounding Natural strategies and for developing their own conversations.

2.2 CiC Sounding Natural Unit One

What sets this textbook apart from other conversational English textbooks most are the two four-page Sounding Natural units that provide basic pragmatic strategies to help students out of situations that would otherwise not only block their conversations, but which may cause them to be misunderstood by native English speakers. In the first unit, students are confronted with the problem of silence in conversation. The problem is presented in the form of a short manga in which Mr. Smith asks Kentaro a question in front of a class of twenty students and is met with total silence. Kentaro maintains eye contact and smiles the whole time, but Mr. Smith begins to sweat uncomfortably.

Students are directed to describe what is happening in the manga and then to brainstorm possible reasons for Kentaro’s silence and for Mr. Smith’s discomfort. After discussion, the teacher can play an audio track that explains the problem in Japanese and provides possible reasons for the silence. In Japanese culture, for example, Kentaro’s silence might mean that he cannot answer the teacher for some reason, that he is thinking, or that he would like the teacher to ask someone else. However, in Western cultures, the textbook explains that this same silence many be taken to mean Kentaro does not want to answer the question, does not like the teacher, or does not respect his authority.

Students can see from this that silence may carry dramatically different meanings for people from different cultures. In English speaking cultures, silence may communicate very negative meanings; whereas, in Japanese culture, the same silence may be interpreted much more positively. At this point, students are presented with the first of three Golden Rules: “When you are asked a question, don’t remain silent for more than a few seconds.” (Vannieu, Talandis & Richman, 2012)

The remainder of the lesson helps students develop strategies for avoiding silence in four different situations. In situation one, students brainstorm what to say when they do not understand a single word that a teacher says to them in English. They then study an example conversation demonstrating one silence avoidance strategy and are encouraged to write their own. Example strategies are “Sorry, I don’t understand.” and “Sorry, I couldn’t follow you.” In situation two, students do similar activities to develop silence avoidance strategies when a teacher is speaking too fast for them to understand. Example strategies are, “Excuse me?” “What was that?” and “Sorry, Could you speak more slowly please?” In situation three, students consider what to do when there is just one part of a question that they do not understand. Example strategies are “What does X mean?” and “What’s X?” In situation four, they learn strategies for how to avoid silence when they understand the question, but do not know how to say something in English. Example strategies are “I don’t know how to say X in English,” and “How do you say X in English?” In the last situation, the textbook advises the students that even when the teacher does not know Japanese, they may solve the problem by asking another student or by looking the word up in a dictionary: Either of which is much better than responding in silence.
2.3 CiC Sounding Natural Unit Two

In the second unit, a manga is again used to present the first problem. Mr. Johnson is asking Tomoko questions in an English class, but Tomoko gives only short minimal answers as follows:

J: Tomoko, have you ever been abroad?
T: Yes.
J: Uh, where did you go?
T: Guam.
J: And… how was it?
T: Nice.

After students read and describe what is happening in the manga. They are told that Mr. Johnson is frustrated because he often sees Tomoko chatting with her friends on campus, so he knows that she is not shy and that she loves to talk. They are asked to brainstorm possible reasons for her minimal answers. After brainstorming and sharing reasons, students can listen to an audio track giving possible reasons, such as the following: She is not used to speaking English; she is afraid of making a mistake in front of her peers; or she does not think that just answering her teacher’s basic question is bad.

The textbook then provides a short explanation of possible differences in Japanese and English communication styles (c.f., Tannen, 1984; Shimizu, 2009). For example, in Japanese conversations, answers to questions may be very short when someone is speaking to a person of higher social status, or when there is a group watching. In these situations, short answers may mean that you are showing respect to the other person, you are being modest, or that you are letting the other person take the lead. Even when there is no audience for the conversation, and there are two people of equal social status who do not know each other well, conversations may consist of many questions and short answers until the speakers find common ground. However, in the West, even in the latter situation, giving just minimal answers to questions will make you sound like you do not want to communicate. In such situations, Westerners may find it difficult to continue the conversation because they expect more information. In other words, they expect the other speaker to do more of the conversational work.

To sound cooperative in English, students are told they need to add one or two extra pieces of information to their basic question answers. For example, when asked the question, “Do you work?” instead of just saying, “Yes” they should say something like, “Yes, I work for a convenience store near my house.” This pragmatic strategy is stated as Golden Rule 2: “Include one or two extra pieces of information in your answers.” As with the first Sounding Natural unit, instructors can play the audio in Japanese to ensure a high level of comprehension (Richman, Vannieu & Talandis, 2012).

In order to follow this rule, students are given training in anticipating and answering a speaker’s implicit questions. After studying some examples, students are asked to brainstorm implicit questions for “Do you like sushi?” and “Have you ever been abroad?” If the answer is yes to the first question, some implicit questions would be “What kind of sushi do you like?” or “How often do you eat sushi?” If the answer is no, implicit questions might include “What kind of food do you like?” or “Why don’t you like sushi?” Students are then given a chance to rewrite a dialog with minimal answers to questions so that it follows Golden Rule 2.

In the final two pages of this unit, students are presented with a manga of two English teachers talking about their weekends during their lunch break.
S: This weekend I didn’t do much at all. I stayed home, watched a couple of DVDs and slept the rest of the time.
B: Really? I went trekking in Nara with a few friends. We camped in the mountains.
S: That’s an active weekend! I don’t have time to do anything like that these days. I’m so overworked.

This conversation is different from the other conversations students have seen so far in that it contains no questions. Each speaker uses aizuchi, or short positive comments about the others’ topic, but talks only about their own weekend. Before any explanation is given, students are asked to write down anything they notice about this conversation.

The textbook then explains that although talking about yourself without asking or being asked questions is quite normal in English, in some situations in Japanese, it may appear egotistical. However, as the textbook explains, it is actually one way to offer topics to the other person, since they may pick up a point to either ask you about, or to tell you about themselves. To sound more natural in English, students are encouraged to offer information about themselves even when not asked a question. This, as the reader may notice, is linked to the talk about yourself portion of the Vary the Way You Speak sections of the regular unit lessons. This is stated as Golden Rule 3: “It’s natural to sometimes speak about yourself without being asked a question.” (Talandis, Richman & Vannieu, 2012)

In the rest of the unit, students are asked to write short conversations of their own without questions. Then, they are asked to analyze a conversation to identify strategies for following each of the three Golden Rules, write their own conversations that follow the three rules and do a self-evaluation exercise designed to help them decide which of the golden rules they may need to practice the most.

3. SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS AND TRAINING

3.1 The Cooperative Principle

The author has developed a handout that provides students with a brief introduction to Grice’s (1975) cooperative principle (See Appendix 1) in order to help them better understand the pragmatic principles underlying the three Golden Rules and many of the pragmatic strategies in the Sounding Natural Notes; and thus, heighten their awareness of the speaker level meanings of their utterances. Students learn there is a cooperative principle underlying our everyday conversations in English (and Japanese) that requires speakers to make their conversational contributions such as required at the stage at which they occur, by the tacitly accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which they are engaged. In addition, they learn about the four maxims that constitute this principle: quantity, quality, relevance and manner. (This section draws on Grice, 1975; Yule, 1996; Shimizu, 2009.)

When Kentaro replies to Mr. Johnson’s question with silence, he is violating the quantity maxim. He is clearly not giving enough information for the conversation class situation he is in, at least not enough for most native English speaking teachers. When speakers opt out of one of the cooperative principle maxims, they communicate more than they say. They communicate extra information by either generalized or particularized conversational implicature. Generalized implicatures require no special knowledge. For example, if the following conversation occurs, the speaker can easily infer that Cathy was not invited. A has communicated more than was said by generalized implicature.
A: Did you invite Jim and Cathy?
B: I invited Jim. (Yule, 1996)

However, in Taro’s case, Mr. Johnson needs considerable particularized cultural knowledge to understand his student’s implicature. He needs more cultural knowledge regarding the use of silence and non-verbal communication in Japanese culture in general, and more knowledge of Japanese classroom communication styles and student-teacher relations in specific. If Mr. Johnson had had such knowledge, like the author’s students, for example, he would have been able to make a number of positive interpretations of Taro’s silence, such as those outlined in 3.1 above.

From a discussion of these differences, Japanese students can learn that silence when speaking English may carry surprisingly negative messages via conversational implicature. They can also learn that while Japanese speakers also follow the cooperative principle when speaking Japanese, the parameters for each of the maxims may be set rather differently (Rose & Kasper, 2001). In certain situations, for example, less information may be required because they can expect their listeners to pay greater attention to non-verbal cues and to have the necessary cultural experience and background knowledge to understand the intended implicature.

When Tomoko only gives short minimal answers to Mr. Johnson’s questions in the second Sounding Natural unit, she is also violating the quantity maxim, and thus appears uncooperative. This, of course, may be the case, but more likely Tomoko is unaware of the unintended messages she sends. While in Japanese, as noted above, short answers may communicate respect and modesty in certain situations, in English, they may communicate the very opposite. A discussion of some of the possible negative implicatures can help students understand the importance of learning to follow Golden Rule 2. The goal is to help them become more aware of the invisible meaning of their utterances (Yule, 1996).

The relationship of the cooperative principle to the third Golden Rule is not as transparent as it is for the first two. However, if students look closely at the conversation between Mr. Smith and Mrs. Brown (section 2.3), they may notice their efforts to follow the maxim of relevance. Mrs. Brown acknowledges interest in Mr. Johnson’s weekend with the aizuchi “Really?” and then tells him about her own weekend, a closely related, and therefore, relevant topic. In Mr. Smith’s second turn, he makes a positive comment about Mrs. Brown’s topic (i.e., “That’s an active weekend!”) before complaining about how busy he is, which may be taken to imply he is envious of Mrs. Brown and signaling his adherence to the relevance maxim. Additionally, as pointed out in the textbook, this style of conversation is a way of offering topics for the other speaker to pick up on. Instead of appearing egotistical, as it may in certain situations in Japanese, it is a cooperative approach to building a conversation.

3.2 Sounding Natural Notes

There are sixteen Sounding Natural Notes dispersed throughout the ten regular textbook units that are designed to give students insight into the influence of culture on language, and to provide them with strategies for making their English sound more natural. To help make these notes more accessible for the students, I have created a handout that lists all sixteen notes (See Appendix Two). The handout is a revised version of the notes in the textbook: some notes have been summarized and others include additional instructor comments or examples. In this section, I will examine a few of these notes, in order to show how they can enable students to keep the three Golden Rules, follow the cooperative
principle and its maxims, or otherwise make their spoken English more pragmatically appropriate.

(1) Starting a Conversation: This note urges students to start their conversations, and by extension, their speaking tests, with a causal greeting and not a Japanese phrase like *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*, which students might be tempted to do in a classroom situation. In addition, I have encouraged students to give casual responses and avoid more formal responses, such as "I'm fine, thank you. And you?" that they have likely learned in junior or senior high school, but which are a bit too formal and stiff for most everyday English conversation situations. There is an opportunity here for the instructor to talk about how we use level of formality to increase or decrease social distance (Takiura, 2008; Spencer-Oatey, 2004; Watts, 2003).

(2) Getting Someone to Repeat: Getting someone to repeat something they have said is a way to follow Golden Rule 1. The first *Sounding Natural* unit provides more detailed advice and training for this strategy. In the speaking tests, I encourage students to practice using this as a kind of performance even when they understand since in the normal classroom situation, there are likely insufficient opportunities for practicing it.

(3) Using "But" to Show Contrast: Students are encouraged to use "but" to link positive and negative expressions of their opinions on a single topic. The textbook explains that this adds depth to their answers to questions and makes their conversational contribution more interesting and natural. Natural here may be interpreted as more honest; that is, using "but" will allow students to communicate their true opinions and feelings on a topic. In technical terms, we may say it allows them to follow the maxim of quality. In addition, it equals a strategy for following Golden Rule 2.

(5) Showing Interest with Short Responses: Note (5) reminds students that natural English conversation requires short listener responses or *aizuchi* just as Japanese does. At a functional level, *Aizuchi* show that listeners are interested in the conversation and that they want to know more. By using *aizuchi*, students can communicate much more than they say. English *aizuchi* are taken up in more detail in section 3.3 below.

(7) Echo Questions: Repeating the speaker’s question can be a way of buying time to think of an appropriate reply, and thus following Golden Rule 1. But like *aizuchi*, it can also signal interest in the speaker’s topic. It may communicate something like: "Wow! That’s an interesting question. Let me think about it just a little before I reply."

(10) Ask Follow-up Questions: Note (10) encourages students to follow their closed questions with an additional question on the same topic. This is a way for students to help each other follow Golden Rule 2. The textbook example follow-up question is prefaced with an *aizuchi*-like comment, "Oh, yeah, where did you go in China?" Having a *Sounding Natural Note* handout, makes it easy to point out to students how strategies like 5 and 10, or 5 and 7 can be linked together, as well as makes it easier to introduce some strategies before they would appear in the textbook. If one follows the textbook, for example, follow-up questions would likely not be introduced until the second semester in a typical 15-week, one day a week university class.

(12) Stressing Important Information: This note states that unlike Japanese, which has little intonation, it is important to stress words correctly in English. As a rule of thumb, the words to stress are the ones the speaker thinks may have new information for the listener. It will be surprising to many students, that when speaking English to a foreigner, the new information may be their name, the name of their hometown or a common Japanese food. This is an excellent chance to teach students
about English time-stress; i.e., stress comes on the vowel, which is not only spoken louder, but for a longer amount of time than vowels with weaker stress. Furthermore, when students use good stress, they are orienting themselves to the manner maxim of the cooperative principle: be clear.

(13) Don’t Say “Play with Friends”: This note points out a common transfer error for Japanese speakers of English who assume the phrase tomodachi to asobu can be directly translated into English. If students are unaware of this, they will send unwanted negative implicatures to their listeners. Pointing out the negative implicature to students, of course, is only the first step. Alternative expressions such as those listed in Appendix Two need to be taught and practiced.

(14) Giving a Reason for Your Answer: Here, students are encouraged to give reasons for “no” answers. They are told that failing to do so will make them sound rude and uncommunicative. Just saying “no” breaks Golden Rule 2 and the quantity maxim, sending the message that the speaker is not cooperating. The failure to cooperate, of course, will often be interpreted as impolite behavior by listeners. Similar to Note (3) above, this note provides students with a strategy for avoiding unintentional rudeness and expands the pragmatic topics available for class discussion.

(16) Transitions: This sums up several sounding natural topics and introduces a discourse level notion of how to change topics. The example dialog uses an aizuchi, “Oh” (Note 5), echo-like question, “you play baseball?” (Note 7) and a follow-up question, “What other sports are you into?” (Note 10) to signal the first topic change. Abruptly changing the topic will violate the relevance maxim of the cooperative principle and may, of course, make the speaker seem rude and overly aggressive.

3.3 Aizuchi Training

In the field of pragmatics and discourse analysis aizuchi are called backchannels. In my English conversation courses, I refer to them as aizuchi or English aizuchi because it is a very familiar term for Japanese students, and thus, helps to simplify the technical nature of the course. Aizuchi may be defined as vocal indications of attention, such as “uh-huh” or “hmm” that speakers use to signal that they are participating in the conversation (Yule, 1996). They function to facilitate the discourse and topic development of a conversation. They show that the listener is actively and cooperatively helping to develop the speakers’ topic. They may vary in range of meaning from “Yes, I’m listening. Please continue.” to “This is a really exciting topic. Please tell me more.” They may be spoken at very brief pauses in the speakers’ turn or spoken simultaneously without being seen as an attempt to take the speakers turn; in other words, they are uttered in a kind of communication “back channel.” Aizuchi may even be uttered in advance or in anticipation of a speaker’s utterance or as short comments that complete the speaker’s sentence (Yule, 1996).

Cutting (2002) states that backchannels and fillers, words with little semantic content, are used to avoid silence, have an interactional, social and cohesive role in spoken communication, but they do not fit into the standard categories of speech acts. She says, they are best seen as belonging to one of two macro-functions of language that supercede speak acts (Brown & Yule, 1983). First, the transactional macro-function is the function by which language transmits content, factual information or ideas. Aizuchi belong to the second interactional macro-function, which is involved in the expression of social relations, personal attitudes, solidarity or social cohesion.

Building on Sounding Natural Note (10), I have developed aizuchi training as a central part of the course. Two handouts have been developed for use in the course: Eye Contact and English Aizuchi, and
English *Aizuchi* Practice (See Appendixes Three and Four). The first handout provides advice on using eye contact in conjunction with *aizuchi* and turn-taking based on Rossiter (1988). First, students are encouraged to use eye contact when they want to get a response such as an *aizuchi* from their partner. Second, they can use eye contact to signal they wish to end their turn, and they want their partner to speak. This may also, of course, be an appropriate place for their partner to make a short *aizuchi*-like comment on the speakers topic to transition smoothly to a new topic (*Sounding Natural Note* 16). Thirdly, they can combine *aizuchi* with eye contact to show interest in their partner’s topic either simultaneously or at brief pause points. The rest of the handout gives various examples of English *aizuchi*, including several examples from the textbook.

For *aizuchi* practice, small groups of four to six students form a circle, choose a topic based on the day’s lesson, and choose one person to just listen and count the number of *aizuchi* used as well as list several examples on the handout. At this point, or in an earlier lesson, the instructor explains that *aizuchi* may be grouped into three levels: level one *aizuchi* have the least sematic content (e.g., uh huh, mm hmm, etc.); level two have slightly more content, but still tend to be very short (e.g., yeah, yes, etc.); and, level three have more semantic content (e.g., Oh, Really? That’s really interesting!). The instructor should then preview the discussion questions regarding the possible discourse patterns of *aizuchi* use; for example, were any overlapping *aizuchi* used, were there any chorused simultaneous *aizuchi*, did *aizuchi* come at pauses, or did the speaker use eye contact to elicit *aizuchi*, et cetra.

Now, the students can start their *aizuchi* practice. The first student asks the second student a question and they have a short conversation that follows the three Golden Rules, in which both speakers practice being active listeners and using *aizuchi*. Then, the second speaker asks the third speaker a question, and so on, until everyone has spoken. When the conversation finishes, students are asked to discuss the levels and types of *aizuchi* used in their groups before reporting to the whole class.

### 3.4 Written Homework

Most weeks, students are given written homework. They are asked to write open questions, closed questions and sentences about themselves for one or more of the *Vary the Way You Speak* sections of their textbooks. The students are asked to write the homework in the textbook since they do not have to turn it in. In the beginning, they may be asked to write just two questions of each type and four or five sentences about themselves. But as the course progresses, they are asked to write considerably more about themselves.

At the beginning of each class for which homework has been assigned, I walk around the class and record whether they have done the assignment or not. Students are given points for the degree of completion, but not for quality. The purpose is to push students to think about the topic in English before class so as to both enhance the quality of talk, and allow for more in-class practice time. By not assessing quality, it is hoped that students can be freed from the fear of making mistakes and be able to both write more and enjoy English more.

### 4. SMALL-GROUP SPEAKING TESTS

#### 4.1 Modified Immediate Method Approach

The *CiC* textbook is designed for the use of the Immediate Method (IM), which has three major
components. First, lesson content focuses on everyday life topics. Speech acts are avoided because they usually require the use of role-plays. Instead, IM focuses on the exchange of real information. Second, IM is pragmatically driven (Latz, 2007). Students learn about differences in Japanese and English communication styles early, and are provided many strategies for following the three Golden Rules. Third, it employs regular conversation tests. The suggested testing approach is for the teacher to spend a portion of each class testing students by having a conversation with one to three students. Material just learned in the classroom forms the content of the conversation test. Students are given a score immediately after the test on their Progress Sheet (Vannieu, 2007; What is the Immediate Method, 2006; Azra et al., 2005).

Over time, I have developed a modified IM approach. I have found that testing students in every class is too time consuming, and takes too much time from instruction and conversation practice. Also, I have found that when I participate in the conversation, it is too difficult to both focus on the conversation and objectively assess the students. After some experimenting, I have settled on doing four small-group speaking tests per 15-week semester. These tests are described in 4.2 below.

The size of a group may vary from two to six students, depending on class size and the students’ preferences. However, three to four student groups are an ideal size because it is difficult for most students to be active listeners in larger groups. I have found that two minutes of speaking time per student works well and allows me to test an entire class on the same day. Test time for a three-student group is six minutes, eight minutes for a four-student group on so on. Once test groups are formed, they are maintained for the entire semester, both to simplify class management and to allow the students to get comfortable working together.

In general, for each speaking test, students must prepare to talk about topics and use structures learned from at least two sections of a unit. There is considerable freedom to develop the topics in accordance with their own interests, but they must use structures learned in class and not stray widely from the topic. Additionally, they are instructed to follow the three Golden Rules and use the pragmatic Sounding Natural Note strategies they have learned in class. Although they may use notes or scripts, they are expected to make good eye contact and avoid reading.

4.2 Speaking Test Description

Here, I will describe the four types of tests that I give in a typical semester. My goal for the first test is to help the students get used to speaking tests as early in the semester as possible, so it is important to keep things simple. Students are told to prepare two to three good open and closed questions that they want to be asked, and/or that they want to ask other group members, as well as prepare their own answers. I tell more advanced classes that they should also be ready to ask follow-up questions. As a group, they must also inform each other of the questions that they both want to ask and want to be asked, and thus negotiate the topics for their first speaking test. They are to use topics and structures from two sections of unit one. The written homework, will have already prepared them quite well for the speaking test, so preparation time can be kept to a minimum. For the first test only, they are told they can use their textbooks if they wish, in part, to make the test seem less intimidating. Although they may not have yet learned about the first Golden Rule, which comes after unit one, they are told they need to avoid silences and to maintain a conversation for the entire time and that grammar errors will not be counted.
The second speaking test comes after students have done both of the Sounding Natural units; consequently, they know the three Golden Rules, have practiced some strategies for following them, and are aware of some important Japanese and English communication style differences. They are told to use at least two sections of unit two of CiC, which is about daily routines and activities. By this time, students will also have had some classroom English aizuchi training, including the activity described above. This is best done in the students actual speaking test groups, since it is a very social activity that may take time getting used to. For this test, students are told they will be assessed on how well they follow all of the Golden Rules, use the Toolbox structures, develop their topics and listen actively using aizuchi, follow-up questions and eye contact. Finally, I let the students know that I will count the number of aizuchi and follow-up questions used.

The third test typically comes quite late in the semester. It covers more topical content, and the students have had more time to practice speaking together, making it easier for them to work together, develop common topics of interest and perform social/interactional strategies such as aizuchi. By this test, the class has covered units three and four about university life, and about sports and music interests and abilities respectively, providing lots of topic options that are both enjoyable and can help them get to know each other better. For this test, students are asked to write a single one-page double-sided scenario for their group, which they must hand in at the beginning of the test. Students will probably need to write more than two pages for the test itself, but I merely want a sample of their conversation that shows their ability to follow the three Golden Rules and use the various Sounding Natural strategies that they have learned. At the top of the scenario, they may stipulate a specific non-classroom context for their conversation, for example a different place, time or member relationships. Students are informed that I will continue to count the number of aizuchi and follow-up questions they use in this test as well, and I give them general advice on the number of topics to use. (For details see 4.3 below.) Finally, when possible, I do the class before this test in a CALL classroom, so I can teach students how to format their scenarios in Microsoft Word and answer any questions they have about how to write the scenario. If this is not possible, students are allowed to handwrite their scenario and give me a photocopy.

The fourth speaking-test is done in the fifteenth week of the semester. This is the students’ final exam, so they are expected to demonstrate what they have learned in the entire semester in terms of strategies. However, there is less time to cover new topical content, so I usually choose to do only a single two-page section of a unit, such as unit 4C that asks students to explain good ways to study English or other foreign languages. The purpose is to narrow the range of topic options, and push students to develop their ideas in detail. Although the purpose is mainly to give students a chance to review and consolidate what they have learned, I may add a new strategy that will help students enhance their performance, such as stressing important information (Note 12). Students are ask to hand in a scenario for this test as well and are informed that it will be given slightly more weight than the other three speaking-tests.

4.3 Assessment and Feedback

Each speaking-test is assessed on a 10-point scale with 6 as the passing score. On a test memo, I list the things that I am looking for such as, appropriate greetings, unit topics, toolbox questions, and target strategies. During the test, I do not speak. I just listen carefully and take notes on anything of
Students are graded on both their performance and signs of effort and preparation, such as written notes, advanced group coordination and rehearsal. Individual students may or may not receive the same score as others in the group. If students do everything very well, they receive a 9 or 10. For an 8 there may be a few minor problems, but the students must have both worked hard and performed well. If there was reasonable effort, but significant problems, students receive a 7. If the problems are more serious, and there is a clear lack of effort, they receive a 6. Any score less than 6 means that the results are not acceptable. For tests one and two, students are given one score, but for tests three and four, there are three scores: one for the group’s sample scenario, one for the student’s individual performance and a total combined score.

By taking careful notes during students’ speaking tests, I am able to provide them with some very specific feedback on their performance. When class size permits, I like to give each group some feedback immediately after the test. After telling them what went especially well, I give them some advice for improving their performance on the next test. In the class following the speaking tests, I give the whole class both some general and specific feedback based on what I observed during the speaking test, after which I pass out scores to each student. In (1-11) below, I give some examples of the kinds of observations made and of the feedback provided.

(1) Greeting Appropriateness. Greetings have a primarily interactional function (Tanaka, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2004) that helps set an appropriate social mood both in real life and in the classroom. Students are encouraged to use casual greetings that are appropriate for classroom and speaking tests both among themselves and with their instructor, such as the greeting below.

A: Hi, Tomoko! How are you?
B: Hi, Kentaro! Not bad. And you?
A: Pretty good.

Students are encouraged to use first names and to use “Hi” instead of “Hello”. For responses, they are asked to use a range of responses that reflect their situation or mood, such as “Great,” “Pretty good,” “Not bad,” “OK,” “So-so,” or “Not so good.” Giving a range of responses will help them to sound much more natural than always replying “I am fine, thank you. And you?” , and hopefully help to set an appropriate, relaxed mood for the speaking test.

In my feedback, I point out both problems and successes. One common problem with greetings is that students forget to use informal responses and simply say, “I’m fine, thank you. And you?” An opposite problem is that they may get carried away and spend too much time on their greetings. With practice though most groups are able to segue smoothly from their greetings to the first topic of conversations, setting a very nice mood for the test.

(2) Topic Development. Counting the number of topics that groups use has proved insightful. I have found that the groups with the highest scores tend to use no more than three or four topics and that they are very good at jointly developing these topics. When students use six or more topics, they are unable to follow Golden Rules 2 and 3. Their conversations may resemble interviews more than conversations. When students fail to develop a topic, I often write my implicit questions on the speaking test memo. Immediately after the test, I can give them this feedback. I may also list some of the topics they have mentioned, but not developed well to heighten their awareness of the number of topics they spoke about and how many they should probably have cut. With good notes, I can give very specific advice.
Sometimes, especially early in a semester before students are used to the system, they stray widely from the topics they have practiced in class. When this happens, students may also make more grammatical errors since they do not have access to the structures presented in the Toolboxes. Furthermore, I tell them that this is unfair to the other students since they may choose easier topics than the rest of the class.

Speaking groups develop topics in different ways. Some groups may introduce several topics at once without much initial development, but then come back to these topics later in the conversation and develop them. In other groups, each student may tend to just develop their own topic, without much contribution to other members’ topics. In severe cases, this may turn into a series of monologues instead of an interactive conversation. The more successful groups develop one common group topic together before moving on to the next one.

(3) Equal Talk Time: When I sense an imbalance in member contribution, I may record the talk time for each member. Students who contribute less are not only given lower scores, but this problem is quickly pointed out to the group so that they can work together to avoid the problem the next time. Once students have practiced using follow-up questions and English aizuchi, I also monitor their active listening contribution to the conversation and provide suitable feedback to the whole group and when appropriate to the whole class.

(4) Aizuchi and Follow-up Questions: I tend to focus on the use of aizuchi and follow-up questions together because I teach them at the same time and because they often have a close relationship in conversation; for example, follow-up questions may be prefaced by an aizuchi, and both are used to support and encourage the development of the speaker’s topic. In the beginning, I usually just count the number of aizuchi and follow-up questions used by each group member, but as students get used to using aizuchi, I shift my focus to tallying level three aizuchi.

In addition, I note the different ways in which groups use aizuchi. Are they timed perfectly at speaker pauses? Is there a partial or complete overlap with the speaker’s talk? Sometimes the same aizuchi are chorused by two or more members. Other times different aizuchi are spoken simultaneously, or uttered with light laughter. They are also followed by follow-up questions that support the speaker’s topic, and at other times they are used by listeners at a transition relevance place (Levinson, 1990) to preface the initiation of their own related and/or new topic. I point out these different use patterns in both feedback to speaking groups immediately after the test and in general feedback to the entire class, as well as incorporate them into classroom aizuchi training by asking students to observe and note some of these patterns themselves.

Finally, a lack of follow-up questions usually indicates a lack of topic development. When this occurs, I encourage students to use what I call a “reporter’s question checklist” to brainstorm good follow-up questions. To do this, students make simple lists such as, what/where/who/when/why/how, from which to brainstorm questions that will help them develop their partners’ topics.

(5) Voice Quality and Clarity. Some students naturally have smaller voices. Before the first speaking test, I talk about the need to speak loudly enough for the teacher to hear. If necessary, I will stop the test momentarily for the first group or so to get the students to speak more loudly. When Sounding Natural Note 12 (Stressing Important Information) has been presented, I also listen for how well students stress the important words in the conversation. If some key words clearly lack good time-stress, I make a note of them so that I can provide specific and immediate feedback. Finally, I have
found that many students tend to almost whisper aizuchi at first. When this happens, I usually just point out the problem immediately after the test and encourage them to be aware of it and continue practicing.

(6) Reading the Script. Since students can use speaking test notes and scripts, they may be tempted to read from them with head and/or eyes down. This not only prevents students from having a natural conversation, it usually makes them harder to understand. When this happens, groups are encouraged to practice more before the test and to not worry if they make a few mistakes since they are not evaluated on their grammar per se. I only mark down on grammar when I think the cause of grammar mistakes is not using the Toolbox structures and straying from the topic.

(7) Expression Overuse. When students overuse a particular expression or a kind of expression, I take notes in order to give specific feedback and advice. One phrase that has been overused is “How about you?” Used appropriately, it is a quick and efficient way to develop a common topic, but it will quickly become monotonous when overused. The same is true for aizuchi or question types. Students may overuse a specific aizuchi, such as “Oh, I see.” Or, in a case of underuse, they may use only one or two of the three levels of aizuchi. Similarly, their conversations will be unnatural if they use mostly open questions or mostly closed questions. Indeed, too many questions itself may be a problem, which is the point of Golden Rule 3, and the Vary the Way You Speak sections of the textbook.

(8) Common Errors. In general, I do not listen for or record grammatical errors. However, I do take note of some errors that are very common for Japanese speakers of English or that may cause confusion. For example, when clothes is pronounced /klouzizu/ instead of /klouz/, I may point this out. Another example is the misuse of “borrow” and “lend”. It is impossible with the system of instruction described here to point out all of the students errors; however, if a few serious or stigmatizing errors are made salient, the hope is that it may help students to notice and avoid the same mistakes in the future.

(9) Golden Rule Violations. One way to provide feedback to students is to tell them how well they followed each of the Golden Rules. If they lapsed into silence, it may be because they failed to practice enough before the speaking test. It may be because they failed to communicate with other group members about the group topics, or it may be because the group as a whole failed to prepare enough topics for the speaking test. If Golden Rule 2 is violated, it may be because students used too many questions or introduced more topics than they could develop during the speaking test time. On the other hand, it may be because they did not anticipate enough implicit questions. If Golden Rule 3 is violated, students’ conversation will most likely come across as an interview, or worse yet, an interrogation. Ability to implement this rule can also be checked by looking at students’ written scenarios.

(10) Fictional Conversations. As noted in 4.2 above, I allow students to stipulate a context for the scenarios other than that of the classroom. However, when a conversation is totally made up, it may lack sufficient topic development since the students cannot fall back on their experience and background knowledge. Although some play-acting, such as acting like you do not understand and asking a clarification question is encouraged, total fabrication is to be avoided.

(11) Mapping Interaction Patterns. Recently, I have found myself mapping students interaction patterns when I assess speaking tests. For example, in a group with three members—A, B and C—I may note that A asks B an open or closed question about topic X and draw an arrow from A to B. If C
utters a supportive level three aizuchi and a follow-up question, I will make a note of it, and draw an arrow to B, and so on. In this way, I note who asks follow-up questions to whom about what, to whom level three aizuchi are made, or to whom clarification questions are made, all the while taking notes about topic development or the lack thereof.

Mapping has several benefits. First, it provides a new graphic assessment tool. Counting the number of times members use a particular strategy is useful, but it does not provide a rich picture of how members interact together. Mapping allows me to “see” how comparatively interactive groups are vis-à-vis each other. Groups with better interaction patterns can, of course, be ranked higher. Second, it provides useful feedback data for each group and for the class as a whole. Positive feedback, in particular, can be made more explicit. Also, it can help the instructor locate useful tips for follow-up class practice and training. Third, and not least, it helps the examiner to focus more intensely on both the content and quality of interaction.

5. CONCLUSIONS

I have found that this approach to English conversation instruction works well with a wide range of proficiencies. For more advanced groups, the Toolbox structures may seem a little easy, but students soon discover that the challenge of adapting it to fit their own lives and contexts while following the Golden Rules is hardly easy. Lower level groups take a little more time to get used to the system, but with practice are quite able to maintain interesting, interactive conversations for the length of the speaking tests by the end of the course. Student feedback suggests that requiring regular written preparation is key to quality classroom conversation practice and quality speaking tests.

This new approach to teaching conversation has opened my eyes to new aspects of pragmatics. Gradually, the underpinnings of the Cooperative Principle have become clearer and clearer. Without getting too technical, its influence can be pointed out to students through discussions of the problems presented in the Sounding Natural units and reinforced in the Sounding Natural Note strategies. Having experienced Mr. Smith’s frustration with silence and minimal answers in my early teaching experience in Japan, I can easily highlight the profoundly different ways that conversational cooperation may be enacted in English and Japanese speaking cultures (c.f., Rose & Kasper, 2001).

More recently, I have become increasingly aware of the close connection between politeness and the Cooperative Principle. Watts (2003) states that Grice himself mentions that a politeness maxim might need to be added to the Cooperative Principle. Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983), and Brown and Levinson (1987, 2011) have all attempted to do precisely that with their theories of politeness. Each of their theories, Watts claims, are based on the assumption that interactants aim for the establishment of communicative cooperation. Polite utterances contribute to this goal by allowing the establishment and maintenance of mutual face. Rose and Kasper (2001) state that the Cooperative Principle and politeness are basic orientations that regulate interaction throughout all communities even though what constitutes cooperation and politeness varies by context and by culture.

Given the close connection between cooperation and politeness, I would like to explicitly introduce some basic principles of politeness to my students as well as add a few politeness strategies to the list of Sounding Natural Notes, without getting too technical. For example, I could show students how aizuchi are used to regulate interpersonal distance (Takiura, 2008; Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Students could
also be given examples of how downgraders and upgraders can be used to orient to Leech’s modesty and agreement maxims (c.f., Shimizu, 2009; Yamaoka, Makihara & Ono, 2010; Spencer-Oatey, 2004). The goal would be to increase awareness of politeness strategies and facilitate speaking test group solidarity without overly complicating the current system for teaching English conversation.

References


Lakoff, R. (1973). The Logic of Politeness; or Minding your P’s and Q’s. Chicago Linguistics Society, 8: 292-305.


KEYWORDS: cooperative principle, communication styles, immediate method, politeness, pragmatic strategies
Appendix One
The Cooperative Principle: A Basic Principle
Underlying Everyday Conversation

The Dog Joke
Scenario: There is a woman sitting on a park bench and a large dog lying on the ground in front of the bench. A man comes along and sits down on the bench (Yule, 1996, p. 36).

Man: (1) Does your dog bite?
Woman: (2) No.
(The man reaches down to pet the dog. The dog bites the man’s hand.)
Man: (3) Ouch! (4) Hey! (5) You said your dog doesn’t bite.
Woman: (6) He doesn’t. (7) But that is not my dog.

Cooperative Principle: Make your conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

This is an unstated conversational principle that allows us to mean more than we say.

Four Maxims (四つの公理)
Quantity: Give enough information (but not more) as necessary for the situation.
Quality: Make your contribution one that is true.
Relevance: Make your contribution relevant.
Manner: Be clear.

How more is communicated than said. (The Jokeの解説)
Presupposition: The woman has a dog.
Quality: What the woman says is true. Her dog does not bite.
Relevance: The no answer is relevant to a yes-no question.
Manner: The words themselves are clear.

Quantity: (2) Does not provide sufficient information for the man to know that the dog in front of him is not the woman’s dog. But the man believes the woman is cooperating... He believes that she is communicating more than she is saying. The woman provides enough information in (7), but it is too late.

(See Grice, 1975; Yule, 1995; Shimizu, 2009)
Appendix Two

Conversations in Class: Sounding Natural Notes

(1) Starting a Conversation (p. 9): Start with a friendly, casual greeting, such as “How are you?” “How are you doing?” Reply with suitably casual response, such as “Great!” “Pretty good!” “Not bad!” “OK,” “So-so.” or “Not so good.”

(2) Getting Someone to Repeat (p. 11): When you want someone to repeat what they have just said, say: “Excuse me?” or “Pardon me?”

(3) Using “But” to Show Contrast (p. 13): Use “but” to express both positive and negative opinions about the same topic. This gives depth to your answers to questions and makes your conversation more interesting and natural.

(4) Qualifying Your Speech (p. 21): Use words like “usually,” “normally,” or “hardly ever” to qualify what you say about your daily life. If you don’t qualify your speech, you may sound stiff and robotic. Example: “I normally go to bed at about 11:00 pm.”

(5) Showing Interest with Short Responses (p. 23): Just like it is important to use aizuchi when speaking Japanese, short responses and comments in English make your conversation more natural. They show that you are interested in the conversation and that you want to hear more!

(6) Rounding Off Numbers (p. 25): When talking about distances or lengths of time don’t be overly precise because it can sound strange and unnatural. Round numbers off to the nearest number ending in 0 or 5. Example: 17 minutes → 15 minutes; 32 minutes → 30 minutes or half an hour.

(7) Echo Questions (p. 35): Repeat all or part of the question you have been asked. This can keep the conversation going, and give you some time to think about your answer. Example: “What do you usually do on weekends?” “On the weekends? Uh, I sometimes like to going window shopping downtown.”

(8) Don’t Be Over-Humble (p. 41): In English deprecating yourself (自分を卑下すること) does not sound honest unless you are genuinely bad at something. If you have a certain ability, but want to be modest about it (謙遜的に言いたい、誇りたくない), use expressions, such as: “Yeah, I’m not too bad, but I really like it. It’s very relaxing.” “Yeah, I’m just beginning, but I already love it. It’s great exercise.”

(9) Ask Personal Questions (p. 49): In the West, questions about a person’s age, sex, salary, religion and politics are usually considered taboo. People who do not know each other well do not discuss these topics because it would be impolite (失礼、無礼). However, if you know the person fairly well and feel comfortable enough to ask about such topics, it is polite to ask permission first (聞く許可を先に求めることが礼義ただし). Example: “Can I ask a personal question?” “If you don’t mind, may I ask your age?”

(10) Ask Follow-up Questions (p. 57): After asking a closed question, such as “Have you ever been abroad?” it is good to keep the conversation going on the same topic by asking a follow-up question. Example: “Oh yeah, where did you go in China?” “Did you like the food?”

(11) Spoken Contractions (p. 59): In spoken English, common expressions such as “Where did you go?” are spoken quickly and the sounds are naturally blended together. The sounds become reduced (縮小や弱められる) and may sound very different. Example: Where did you go = Where jya go? What
(12) **Stressing Important Information** (p. 67): Unlike Japanese, which has very little intonation, stressing the correct words is very important in spoken English. As a rule of thumb, when giving an answer, put emphasis on the information the listener doesn’t know. It’s OK to stress more than one word in a sentence. Example 1: In self-introductions, stress all the syllables in your name or the name of your hometown since these may all be new words! Example 2: “What kind of food do you like?” “I really like yakitori, and I don’t mind sashimi.”

(13) **Don’t Say “Play with Friends”** (p. 69): In Japanese it is common to use the word asobu when talking about spending time with friends, but in English the literal translation “to play” is only used for small children. Instead of saying “play with,” say “hang out with,” “meet up with,” “spend time with,” etc. For example: “On Saturday, I will hang out/go out with some friends.” “On Saturday night, I’m going to meet up with some friends.”

(14) **Giving a Reason for Your Answer** (p. 73): If you answer “No” to the question “Do you work?”, you should include a reason as to why you don’t work (for example, you have no time, you live too far from university, etc.). Answering with only “No” sounds a little rude and uncommunicative. 単に“No”と言うだけだと少々不躾で無口な印象を相手に与えます。（Example: A: Do you work? B: No, I don’t. I’d like to, but I’m too busy.）

(15) **Distinguishing Yourself from Others** (p. 83): Sometimes in conversation, you may speak about the general habits of a group of people that you belong to (for example university students, Americans, etc.). In this situation, it’s OK to mention your own habits or opinions, even if they are different from the group’s. For example: “Most Canadians love to watch ice hockey, but I’m not a fan myself.” “I lot of Japanese like to drink sake, but I never do.”

(16) **Transitions** (p. 91): In an English conversation, it is very unnatural to suddenly switch to an unrelated topic. Try to find a detail that allows you to ask a related question. If you want to change the topic you can use phrases like “by the way.” (c.f., Relevance maxim: 関連性公理参照) Example:

A: Man, you look tired.
B: Yeah, I was at school late doing club activities.
A: Really? What club are you in?
B: Baseball.
A: Oh, you play baseball? What other sports are you into? <Aizuchi and comment to topic shift.>
B: I used to play volleyball in high school.
A: Really? I was in the drama club.
B: By the way, did you finish the homework? <Transition phrase to topic change.>
A: Yeah, it wasn’t too difficult.

Adapted from Richiman & Vannieu (2009).
Eye Contact and English Aizuchi

Using short aizuchi-like English responses is a great way to make your conversation more natural and to show interest in your partners’ topic. The use of eye contact and appropriate facial expressions (適切な表情) at the same time can make your aizuchi even more effective.

Eye Contact Advice

Use eye contact when:
(1) you want to get a response from your partner;
(2) you wish to end your speaking turn, and you want your partner to speak;
(3) you want to show your interest in your partners’ topic.

Aizuchi Examples

<I’m listening. Please continue.>
Uh huh.
Mm hm.

<Showing a slightly deeper level of interest.>
Yeah.
Yes.

<Showing surprise and a deeper level of interest.>
Oh really!
Oh really?
That’s amazing!
That’s really interesting!

<I see vs. I know>

*I see* is a little different than an aizuchi that simply shows interest. It means that you now understand something that you did not understand before. (つまり、「今まで分からなかったことが今分かった」という納得の表現です。)

A: You open the bottle like this.
B: Oh, I see.

*I know* may be confused with *I see*, but it has a stronger meaning. If you use it like an aizuchi it might sound impolite (無礼に聞こえる), like “I already new that! You didn’t have to tell me that!”

A: I live in the small house by the bridge.
B: Oh, yes, I know.
Other Aizuchi and Expressions That Show Interest

That’s cool. *Iaido* What’s that? (c.f. CiC, p. 33)
Oh, you don’t like math? (c.f. CiC, p. 35)
Really? How so? (c.f. CiC, p. 35)
Wow! Handball’s fun. We should play sometime. (c.f. CiC, p. 41)

**Pointer:** Adding a positive comment or a quick question for more information on the speaker’s topic is a very effective way to show you are interested and cooperative.

*CiC=Conversations in Class*
Adapted from Rossiter (1988).
Appendix Four

English Aizuchi Practice

Speakers' Names: __________________________________________
Recorder's Name: __________________________________________
Conversation Topic: _________________________________________

Directions: Form a circle with your group. Write the names of your group members and your conversation topic above. Choose one recorder to listen to your conversation and count the number of aizuchi used. The recorder should also list some examples of aizuchi used.

When you finish, answer these questions. What level of aizuchi did you use? Did you use overlapping aizuchi? Did two or more listeners use simultaneous aizuchi? Did you add short comments or follow-up questions to aizuchi?

Aizuchi Count!! Aizuchi Examples!!

Level 1 (Uh huh, mm hmm) ; Level 2 (Yeah, yes) ; Level 3 (Oh really? That's really interesting!!)