

Developing a Needs Analysis of a Japanese Student in a CLIL Context

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Developing learner profiles and assessing students' motivations to learn are important for a teacher in any subject. This report examines developing a learner profile of a Japanese student studying English. While it focuses on one student, the report summarises a relatively typical learner profile that can be practically applied to an English class. This report will refer to an interview with a student. Based largely on this interview, the report will then diagnose specific problems, identify phonological errors and finally, give recommendations to address some of these problems.

The needs analysis and diagnosed problems are applicable to any non-English speaking student, particularly beginner or lower level students. The reports' classroom teaching methodology is grounded in CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning). It should be noted that this report does not specifically focus on CLIL. However, the teaching method draws from CLIL, particularly in the context of communication - focused learning.

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1. Needs Analysis

Riko is a 19 year old Japanese student of English. She is a high school graduate. The average English level of a Japanese high school graduate is approximately equivalent to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (or, CEFR) A2 level. There are many B1 and higher exceptions (see Appendix I). Riko is just under A2 level. She is a former student of the author's from Kagoshima. She is currently working in a kindergarten and is studying a pre-university course in childcare. In recent years, Japan's Ministry of Education is increasingly promoting English at a younger age. Currently, some kindergartens are already adopting English as a subject. Riko will need English for further university studies, and may need it for future job prospects. Her older sister can speak English at a C1 level, and is proficient with English.

Riko has studied English for six years in total, three years at junior high school and three

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years at high school. She found English very difficult. Riko does not use English outside of school and did not require English for an entry-level job. This is not unusual in Japan - most jobs do not require any English ability. However, now her motivation has changed, and she will need to take an English test in the future (most likely the EIKEN test).

While Riko did not have a good experience with English in school, she was an attentive and outgoing student who enjoyed doing ESL activities in junior high school, and she was enthusiastic about doing the interview for this report despite not needing to do so. She also enjoys her job, and realises that she may need English to progress further, and that this need may be enforced by her kindergarten. She was reasonably studious in class, but definitely preferred activities and learning through experience rather than reading or listening. This could be because she inferred more meaning through body language, intonation, gestures and direct teacher guidance, rather than understanding through studying. Riko is a friendly person and enjoys talking with people. She was not a shy student even though she did not particularly enjoy English. So, she is eager to communicate and a communication focus in class would be a good way to approach teaching her English as a target language.

Riko's difficulties are common to other A - level students, but are compounded by living in Japan, where there are limited opportunities to speak English regularly. The interview for this report was done via Skype.

2. Diagnose Problems

A self-introduction is a common cultural element in Japanese communication and this is why it was chosen as part of the interview. It follows a recognisable format, with a typical greeting, followed by asking about jobs, hobbies, likes/dislikes and so on.

Riko's **speaking** was reasonable considering her level and that she has not been in school for some time. Riko often needed prompting using Japanese keywords. She sometimes used keywords rather than sentences to answer questions, for example:

Teacher: "Do you like your job?"

Riko: "Yes!"

T: "Do you have brothers or sisters?"

R: "Sister!"

Along with the interview, a short text (see Appendix) was sent to Riko to assess some reading ability. The **reading** aspect of the interview went well. Riko did not have time to prepare for the text, and she knew how the basic words should sound, even if she couldn't execute the task perfectly. Riko only missed one question, and the picture of the train ticket had vocabulary which was not pre-taught. Most of Riko's issues with reading came from her

pronunciation, but her scanned reading was quite accurate and showed good understanding.

To return to the interview, Riko's **Listening** was generally good. The Japanese self-introduction follows a set of expected questions, so there was probably an element of listening for keywords and inferring meaning from those. However, she was able to answer the questions posed in English, even with some prompting from the teacher in Japanese. She could use the word "kindergarten" perfectly in context and she never asked to repeat a question, despite an unstable Skype connection. Riko's vocabulary was the main issue with her listening. Her lack of vocabulary proved an obstacle in answering the questions in detail, leading to more prompting in Japanese.

The author has attached Riko's goodbye message from high school. Riko's **writing** is pre-learned, but at A level is good. Riko's writing is a higher standard than her speaking ability. There are common errors to Japanese learners: "English classes are memory" (missing "a") and "try study English hard" (missing "to"). The future continuous tense is present: "looking forward to" which can be spotty at A level. She took time writing this piece, and the neatness reflects this.



Riko speaks English in a hesitant manner. She often pauses to think about what to say next, which results in a basic conversation that does not flow naturally. This overall lack of confidence with English is common for A level speakers. This is not helped by having limited opportunities or incentives to speak English outside of an (often expensive) English language school.

Many difficulties that Japanese learners have with English are not always due to problems with the language but are also the result of cultural differences. Japanese people can be afraid to make mistakes, and are often embarrassed with their level of English after years of studying it in school. This is an obstacle to language fluency. When confronted with a word that she doesn't know, Riko tends to panic and revert to Japanese. Similar issues are seen in other countries, such as Ireland, where students must study Irish for 12 years yet cannot speak the language fluently. (Less than 2% of the Irish population can speak Irish daily.)

When Riko answered the interview question "how many brothers and sisters do you have", she answered "sister!" Riko made this error twice, for when asked "how many sisters do you have" she answered "I have two sister." The Japanese language does not use plurals, and Riko's error here reflects this.

Riko had some vocabulary problems, too. Mainly a lack of vocabulary. This lack of vocabulary led to some very short answers during the interview: "Do you like your job", "Yes." Having said that, Riko could understand the format for "do you like" questions; she just didn't have enough vocabulary to expand her answers. On the Skype camera, she was gesturing a lot while trying to think of the English, so she was trying her best to communicate and answer the interview questions. Riko struggled with answering some questions without some prompting using Japanese keywords. For example, "what is your job" caused her to panic briefly until she was reminded what the word "job" means. She then remembered and answered the question perfectly.

For the reading task, Riko was able to follow the text because true or false activities are common in Japanese junior and senior high schools.

Riko also had problems when reading numbers. She got 'eight' and 'six' confused, and using tens was also a problem. "Forty-three" for the time (10:43) and "fifty-eight" (for 58 minutes) had to be drilled during the interview. Riko understood that she was reading time and a duration, but got confused about how to say the numbers aloud. Japanese numbers and counting styles are difficult, confusing and complex in structure. This could account for some of the confusion. After drilling with her during the reading exercise, Riko was able to repeat these numbers correctly perfectly, but it is clear that numbers are a difficulty.

Japanese has a Subject-Object-Verb word order; 'prepositions' follow the noun and subordinating conjunctions follow their clause; other particles (for example, to express interrogation) follow the sentence. All adjectival phrases precede the noun they modify. In all of these aspects Japanese is different from English. Mistakes in the production of correct

English syntax are therefore unsurprising. While Riko did not have many writing errors, the sentences she used in her letter was recognisably Japanese, for example, “memory that is very important to me” and “I was looking forward to having your English class every time”. These phrases and phrases like them are often used by Japanese learners of English. At Riko’s level, she probably learned these phrases by rote, and she used them accurately and in the correct context.

3. Phonological Errors

For this section, it is worth looking very briefly at a summary of Japanese:

- Japanese is polysyllabic and has an elaborate inflectional system
- Japanese is not tonal, every syllable is given equal stress
- Has 5 vowels: /a/, /e/, /u/, /e/, and /o/
- Vowels vary in duration, as they do in English
- Has 18 consonants: /k/, /s/, /t/, /n/, /h/, /m/, /y/, /r/, /w/, /g/, /d/, /b/, /z/, /p/, /ch/, /sh/, and /j/
- Only /n/ occurs as a final consonant
- Double consonants may occur

Japanese is not a European language, and thus shares no cognates with English. Foreign loanwords are used in their *katakana* script, but these foreign loanwords suffer when read aloud. Japanese has 5 pure vowel sounds that may be short or long. The syllable structure is simple, generally with the vowel sound preceded by one of approximately 15 consonant sounds. This results in words ending with a vowel that should end with a consonant. For example, Riko reading “the first train leaves” read as “za faasto torainu leevsu”. This *katakana*-style reading means that it is difficult for Japanese learners to pronounce English words correctly.

Other features relating to phonological differences include:

- Substitutions of:
 - /r/ for /l/
 - /s/ for voiceless /th/
 - /z/ for voiced /th/
 - /j/ for voiced /th/
 - /b/ for /v/, for example my name was pronounced “Deibiddo”
 - The /f/ sounds is produced between /f/ and /h/
 - The /r/ sound is produced between the English /l/ and /r/
 - The closest approximation to the voiceless /th/ is /t/ in English

- The /d/ comes closest to the voiced /th/ in English
- And /j/ comes closes to the English /z/ as in azure

These features should provide context to the following phonological errors:

During the **interview**, Riko used the following sentences as the phonemic script describes.

Phonemic Script (British English IPA)	English
/maɪ 'neɪ'mu: 'ɪzu:/	My name is...
/aɪm 'fɔ:ɾə'mu/	I'm from...
/aɪ'mu 'wɜ:kɪŋ gu: ɪn ə 'kɪndə: gɑ:tn, /	I'm working in a kindergarten.
/aɪ 'laɪ'ku:/ / aɪ dəʊntəʊ 'laɪ'ku:/	I like.../I don't like...
/'sɪstə: /	sister
/tʃu: /	two
Received Pronunciation (RP) Interview (Phonemic Script - British English IPA)	
/maɪ 'neɪm ɪz/	
/aɪm frɒm/	
/aɪm 'wɜ:kɪŋ ɪn ə 'kɪndəgɑ:tn, /	
/'aɪ 'laɪk 'aɪ dəʊnt 'laɪk/	
/'sɪstə /	
/tu: /	

For the **Reading** task, Riko read the following phonemic script aloud:

Phonemic Script (British English IPA)	English
/dʒə tʃɪk'etəʊ ,ef'əʊ treɪn ,ef'əʊ ɒks u: fæd əʊ/	The ticket (is – ignored this) for the first train for Oxford. (also did not use plurals for 'tickets')
/dʒə fɑ:stəʊ li:v'zu/	the first (train) leaves
/tʃeɪndʒi:/	change
/sju: 'ri:/	three
/ ʃɪn gu: ru:/	single
Received Pronunciation (RP) Reading (Phonemic Script - British English IPA)	
/ ðə 'tɪkɪt s fə ðə 'fɜ:st treɪn fəɾ 'ɒksfəd /	
/ ðə 'fɜ:st treɪn li:vz /	
/ tʃeɪndʒ /	
/ θ ri: /	
/ 'sɪŋɡl, /	

As we can see from these tables, Riko's pronunciation differs from received (British) English pronunciation.

Japanese ESL students find English hard to pronounce and often insert short vowels between the consonant, or at the end of consonants, as Riko done several times. Riko also

struggled with the (/θ/ /ð/) sounds. The extreme language differences account for the majority of Riko's phonemic differences in speaking and reading aloud.

Japanese students of English usually can manage reading English. Traditionally, Japanese is written in columns from top to bottom and from right to left. Books start at the back. Modern Japanese is written or printed in the same order of words on the page as English. The Japanese *romaji* script uses Latin characters to transcribe words for Japanese audiences. However, for intonation, words stress and sentence stress, reading aloud alone does not usually help Japanese learners with problems relating to these. Riko's reading had no intonation variation, resulting in a monotonous reading where it was difficult to check when her sentences ended. Japanese is a sound-sensitive language, so a monotonous reading of English is an opposite, but prevalent problem for Japanese learners of English, and Riko proved to be no exception to this. It was difficult to identify a specific part of the reading or interview - there was no intonation, words stress or sentence stress whatsoever.

A possible change in stress occurred as a result of adding the vowels in between and finishing consonants. For example, Riko pronounced the word 'ticket' as "chiketto" and she stressed chi-ket-toe equally. The same applied to her regular English words, such as 'I'm', which Riko pronounced "ai-moo".

4. Recommendations

For Riko, and for A level students generally, the biggest recommendation is to practice English as much as possible. Since she is in an environment where she doesn't use English every day, Riko's options are limited. There are plenty of English conversational schools, called *eikaiwas*, which are private schools focusing on English communication. They offer structured classes with experienced English teachers. For someone like Riko, as a base for learning English, she could join one of these schools and attend classes as much as possible, or even sign up to do a course in one of these schools. From the *eikaiwa*, she can focus on her skills:

1. Listening skills:

Despite the previous recommendation, many *eikaiwas* do not focus solely on improving listening skills. Japanese junior and senior high schools use listening tapes played on radios for exams, but after leaving school, Riko probably will not encounter this much. Rather, Riko's listening practice may have to come through the conversations in a school. Riko's listening skills will then be done with visual assistance, so she can use body language and gestures to infer meaning. At her level, she may not be ready for solely listening via telephone yet.

2. Reading and writing skills:

At an *eikaiwa*, Riko could use a textbook that covers grammar and vocabulary in a structured manner. Additionally, activities use the topic covered by the textbook as a base, as well as building on previously learned material. This will be especially useful if Riko signs up for a course, rather than just doing conversation practise only. To expand on her writing skill, an extra writing activity separate from the *eikaiwa* course might be useful for Riko. Based on her interests in high school, Riko would benefit with having a reason for writing, so perhaps an email exchange with her classmates would help her a lot. With her peers it's still part of school and they would also be at her level of English.

3. Reading skills:

Based on what the Skype web camera showed during the interview, Riko followed the text passage slowly, using her finger to track where she was on the page. While she could read the words, she is not able for a text such as a newspaper at her current level. She needs to be more confident and comfortable with English before she tries that. She needs to practice English regularly in a structured manner in order to buy literature or newspapers for herself. Perhaps reading a children's book in English would be good for improving Riko's reading skill.

4. Pronunciation: Riko needs work with her English pronunciation. However, she shares this with other L1 Japanese learners. Again, joining a class would help Riko greatly. A class should include activities that focus on phonics to drill English pronunciation. Some English textbooks contain activities which focus on this, for example, *Foxy Phonics*. Again, a classroom peer dynamic would make sure that Riko's not alone in learning better pronunciation. Being consistent with the drilling will hopefully reduce the *katakana* readings that were so present with Riko's English. However, Riko's level of English is still very low, so it should be expected that this will not be an immediate solution, but rather a regular, consistent study aid.

5. Speaking skills:

This is a skill where Riko could improve quickly, as she is friendly and enjoys conversation. Speaking is also a more active process. However, Riko still lacks the vocabulary to do so without the fear of making mistakes, or thinking too much, searching for what vocabulary to use. Riko needs to expand her vocabulary greatly. At the moment, her English keywords are very limited. Attending a class would give Riko access to and opportunities to learn new words every week. *Eikaiwas* focus on conversation, so this has potential to be a skill that could be rapidly improved.

6. Word/sentence stress and intonation:

This could be greatly improved alongside a comprehensive phonics activity with every class. Riko is still at a very low level, so the focus should be on getting her more comfortable and confident with using English, and then focusing on tweaking her sentence stress, word stress and intonation. This aspect of the language is something that is best learned intuitively and naturally instead of in a contrived fashion. However, it is fair to say that she may not be ready for a total immersion in an English-speaking country just yet. Indeed, she does not have the opportunity to do that at the moment. So there is no solution as such, but with improved phonemic practice and a consistent course attendance will gradually improve this skill.

Appendix

References for Japanese Language Characteristics were:

Castillo et al. *A brief glance at the Japanese* culture Manual. Found here:

(<http://languagemanuals.weebly.com/uploads/4/8/5/3/4853169/japanesemanual.pdf> p8)
 [Last accessed 10/11/2017]

The differences between English and Japanese. Found here:

<http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/japanese.htm> [Last accessed 10/11/2017]

Other Sources and References used were:

Foxy Phonics by National AJET (former Assistant Language Teachers in Japan)

Irish Census, 2016

I

CEFR level	MEXT benchmark
C1	
B2	English teachers
B1	High school graduates
A2	High school graduates
A1	Junior high school graduates

Source: The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) <http://stepeiken.org/grades>

II Reading Task

Departs	From	To	Arrives	Duration	Changes
10:43	Oxford Platform 1	London Paddington Platform 11	11:54	1h 11m	1
11:01	Oxford Platform 1	London Paddington Platform 2	11:59	58m	0
11:07	Oxford Platform 1	London Paddington Platform 3	12:14	1h 07m	1
11:16	Oxford Platform 1	London Paddington (PAD) Platform 4	12:23	1h 07m	1

At the train station

Are the sentences true or false? Circle the correct answer

The ticket is for trains to Oxford.

True False

All trains leave from platform 1.

True False

The first train leaves Oxford at 10:43.

True False

The 10:43 train from Oxford takes 58 minutes to get to London.

True False

You don't have to change trains if you take the 11:01 train.

True False

The 11:16 train from Oxford arrives in London on platform 3.

True False

The ticket is for a single journey only.

True False

With this ticket you can go to any station in London.

True False

III

Name Riko S.

Age 19

Nationality Japanese

Job Assistant kindergarten teacher (recent high school graduate)

Reasons for learning English / motivation Riko will need English to progress with further education in elementary childcare. The Japanese government is also looking at introducing English to Japanese elementary schools, so this may be enforced on her jobs in the future.

Personal goals with English. To improve all aspects of her English, with the ultimate goal of being able to use it for work and future study.

Language learning background - English / other languages. Six years total English study - three in junior high school and three in high school. Despite this time, English proficiency in Japan is generally low. Most high school graduates are A2 level, with B1 exceptions.

Student's impression of his/her level of English and his / her weak and strong areas

Riko did not like English in high school and is not comfortable with using it at all. Also has a fear of making mistakes, which, along with a low vocabulary knowledge, greatly impedes her conversational ability.

Activities they enjoy / find useful in class. Riko enjoyed speaking and general ESL activities when this was taught to her in junior high and in high school. She certainly enjoyed doing that much more than studying from textbooks.

Feelings about learning English / English-language culture

Rather indifferent, (but not negative) to English culture. Wants to learn English for practical reasons relating to work and potential future university study.

Contact with English outside the classroom (including work) Practically non-existent.

Time dedicated to English study out of class and what type of study

Again, practically non-existent at the moment. Hasn't really had to use English after graduating high school.

