

TOEIC® Newsletter

— Digest Version —

【Special Feature】

Making use of the TOEIC® SW tests

The TOEIC Speaking and Writing tests (TOEIC SW tests) were introduced in January 2007 as a way to gauge examinees' speaking and writing abilities. Group applications to take the Secure Program (SP) began in December of that year, and the Institutional Program (IP) was launched the following June, thus allowing companies, schools, and other organizations to start making use of the TOEIC SW tests.

In this issue, we take a look at businesses and universities that have been prompt in introducing the TOEIC SW tests and are using the tests (along with the TOEIC test) to improve the English ability of those within their respective institutions.

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The TOEIC® Newsletter is published quarterly by the Institute for International Business Communication (IIBC) in Japanese. It features how the TOEIC test is used effectively within companies, universities and other institutions. We offer the latest case studies of TOEIC test usage to our clients, so they can take full advantage of the TOEIC test within their organization. In this journal, we also introduce a trend of global human resources development and the globalization movement in Japan.

This issue is a summary of the TOEIC Newsletter No.103 (issued: November 2008) translated into English by IIBC for its readers around the world.

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“The key to communication is a strong will to get your message across”

Oki Matsumoto

Representative Director, President & CEO
Monex Group, Inc.

Mr. Oki Matsumoto launched Monex Inc. after working for more than a decade at a foreign company's branch in Japan. We asked him about the secrets to successful communication in our increasingly globalized world.

Communication is not the same as conversation. We need to change the way to get our message across in the global community

Oki Matsumoto

Born in 1963; graduated from University of Tokyo's Faculty of Law in 1987. Worked for Salomon Brothers Asia and then Goldman Sachs, where at age 30 he became the youngest person to become a general partner. Founded Monex with joint funding from Sony in 1999 and assumed its presidency. Currently serves as CEO of Monex Group.



When Japanese people speak English, our instinct is to make a conscious effort to speak it properly. But that is not the case with our Asian neighbors, such as the Chinese.

China has people like Li Yang, for instance, who espouses a unique way of learning English he calls “crazy English.” The first phrase he teaches is, “We can help the world,” which I think illustrates his desire to interact with and influence the global community.

Communication is not the same as conversation. Whereas conversation is just the exchange of words and information, communication is aimed at exchanging ideas; which is to say, it is designed to lead to some sort of outcome. This is the viewpoint from which the Chinese learn English, whereas the Japanese study conversation with the primary aim of speaking properly.

Unless we change the way we look at communication, there is a real danger that Japan will have no voice in the global community. This was made clear to me when I attended an annual

meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. In the opening address, the speaker said: “Bad loans are about to become a global problem. We must think of ways to avoid ending up like Japan and Argentina when that happens.”

I responded to that comment by saying: “Argentina defaulted on its debts before, but Japan's bad loans were limited to a number of banks, so it was certainly not a question of the country being bankrupt. It is wrong to lump the two countries together in this debate.”

But what if no one had spoken up? A global organization would have gone ahead with an important debate based on a faulty premise. Only three Japanese people were in attendance at the meeting and their voices were rarely heard. This reticence to speak was a shame because Japan has so much knowledge to offer after having gone through a bad loan crisis of its own before.

I mistakenly thought I would get the hang of speaking English after a few days living overseas

I also really struggled with English. During the summer vacation of my senior year at university, I stayed at a student dormitory at Tufts University in Massachusetts. I wasn't actually taking any courses, just staying in the dormitory, but the university was holding summer school courses at that time, so the dining area and the halls of the dormitory were filled with students from around the world, all talking with each other in English. I tried to join in but couldn't understand what the others were saying and couldn't make myself clearly understood.

I had the mistaken idea that I would get the hang of speaking in English in just a few days, based on the fact that I had taken a trip to the United States with a friend the previous year and had been studying English since junior high school. After two weeks or so I had experienced about all that I could take, so I cut short my stay by a week and went home wounded.

After returning to Japan, I was determined to do something about the inferiority complex I had

acquired with regard to English. I decided to get a job with an US company and I planned to improve my English by placing myself in a situation where I would have no choice but to speak the language.

Interaction in the global community means that Japanese people need to use English to express the ideas they have in Japanese

I ended up working in foreign companies for twelve years. That experience allowed me to improve my ability to communicate in English, and taught me the importance of having a strong desire to get my message across to others. The attitude that you might not be understood because you're not so good at English only makes it harder to get your message across.

In an increasingly globalized world, people from different countries and different backgrounds, who have different values, work together using English as their common language. Some people say that Japanese people need to improve their English ability and build up their knowledge of Japanese culture and history before they can be a part of the global community, but I don't really subscribe to that view.

What's important is not cultural knowledge but the values that uphold that culture. And underlying those values is language. There is a difference between thoughts in Japanese and thoughts in English. In the global community, the important thing is your way of thinking, your values, and the information you offer.

For instance, Japan has already been through the crises that the developed world is currently grappling with (i.e., bad loans, the environment, and pensions) and has had success in some areas. This means that we have a wealth of information to pass on to the global community, and we should use that knowledge to carry out our role as one of the world's leading countries.

For Japanese people, interacting in the global community means articulating in English what we are thinking in Japanese.

TOEIC® SW tests used to gauge the effect of communication-oriented English training for employees

Columbia Sportswear Japan, Inc.

TOEIC test given to all employees to raise motivation to study English

Columbia Sportswear Japan, Inc is the local arm of the Columbia Sportswear Company, one of the leading comprehensive outerwear and sportswear manufacturers in the United States. It was established in 1997 to spearhead the overall managerial effort to establish the Columbia brand in Japan.

The company introduced the TOEIC test in 2006, in response to the increasing importance of communication between the US headquarters and Japan because of the expansion of the Japanese market.

Takahiko Kouno of Administration and Human Resources (HR), spoke to us about the reasons Columbia Sportswear Japan introduced the TOEIC test.

“There are two reasons,” he explains. “First of all, we required a tool to motivate employees to learn English, given our increasing awareness of the need to put in place a workplace environment where employees would come into contact with that language. Secondly, we had begun in-house English training for employees and needed to create a standard to determine who should participate in the program.

“Currently, everyone who works at the head office takes the TOEIC test once a year.”

A training program to improve the key business skills of speaking and writing English

Columbia Sportswear Japan introduced the TOEIC SW tests in 2008, and aims to use the tests to gauge the effectiveness of its recently revamped in-house English training program.

Under the old training program, Columbia

employees took six-month group lessons oriented towards English conversation. Starting in 2008, however, this was changed to one-on-one lessons in order to better address individual needs.

Employees in a number of the company's departments are required to communicate with the US headquarters. Obviously, time differences mean that a large part of their daily interaction is done in writing, such as e-mail, but there are also conference calls and meetings in the US that must be attended, not to mention visits to Japan by staff from company headquarters. So there are times when Japanese employees must be able to converse in English.

Given this situation, it was suggested that one-on-one lessons with a stronger focus on communication would better serve the company's purposes than the old system. Under the new system, specific lesson content is tailored to suit each employee's wishes. Mr. Kouno points out:

“No training is effective if the trainees don't really want to be there. The purpose of our training program is to enable employees to put their English skills to use at work and, to that end, we aim to provide the sort of lessons that each student really wants, allowing them to choose from either Japanese instructors or those whose native language is English. Students are also given homework designed to ensure that they come into contact with English every day. There are very few absences, with the attendance rate around 90 percent, so I can only assume that employees are quite satisfied with the program.”

According to Mr. Kouno, Columbia chose the TOEIC SW tests to measure the effectiveness of its in-house training program because the tests best suited its communication-oriented objectives.

“At Columbia,” he says, “speaking and writing are important of the linguistic skills. We chose to employ the TOEIC SW tests because they provide a way to gauge both of those skills directly.



Takahiko Kouno
Administration & HR
Columbia Sportswear
Japan, Inc.

2008. The program is focused on a broad range of topics that pertain to the company's business, including law and finance. English classes do not include TOEIC test preparation, but instead aim to improve students' writing and conversational abilities. Mr. Kouno offers the following explanation of the company's approach:

“We don't administer the TOEIC test simply because we want employees to improve their scores. Rather, we want employees to gauge their own English abilities and identify the areas that need improvement, then use that knowledge to further their studies and put their English skills to use at work.”

Columbia's use of in-house English training, distance learning, TOEIC tests and TOEIC SW tests have resulted in an increased awareness of the importance of English. This awareness is reflected in the fact that around half of the employees taking distance learning classes are enrolled in a class related to English.

Mr. Kouno finally offered his impressions on the role of TOEIC within that culture of English learning that Columbia is building:

“The tests provide a way for our employees to broaden their horizons. This is important not just for those who work in departments where English ability is needed, but also for those whom English would provide access to a wealth of information available around the world that they could then apply to their work. We are confident that our training programs, the TOEIC test, and the TOEIC SW tests will open up a whole new world of possibilities for our employees.”

Plus, combining the tests with the TOEIC test means that we can evaluate all four linguistic skills.”

So far, Columbia has held the TOEIC SW tests twice—before and after the training program—and feedback has been good, with employees saying that the tests enabled them to become aware of their actual skill levels.

“You can't communicate effectively if you spend your time composing statements in your mind before you speak, and I think the TOEIC SW tests are very practical in that sense, because they set time limits and demand swift answers from examinees. It is my hope that the tests serve to inspire our staff to work on their ability to communicate—with an emphasis on speed as well. The ability to measure the English communication skills we need at work through test scores has served as a major stimulus for the employees of Columbia, not least because of the emphasis on detailed speaking and writing skills that cannot be gauged by the TOEIC test alone.

“We have high hopes that the results of subsequent tests will help us to discern the efficacy of our training program, and to that end we will continue to use both the TOEIC SW tests and the TOEIC test as a part of our in-house English training.”

Using distance learning to spur English study

At Columbia, the head office introduced a fully-funded distance learning program, starting in

Company overview

Name : Columbia Sportswear Japan, Inc.
Founded : 1997
Employees : 90 (at head office)

The Japanese arm of the US parent company Columbia Sportswear Company, based in Portland, Oregon, which is one of the largest outerwear and sportswear manufacturers in the world.

Practical business English students take TOEIC® SW tests

Business Breakthrough Inc. is a management training company whose courses at its Graduate School of Business Open College include a language training course called Practical English for Global Leaders. We spoke to Keiko Yamada, a manager of the Kenichi Ohmae Graduate School of Business, about the use of the TOEIC test and TOEIC SW tests as part of that course.

At the Open College, one of our courses is Practical English for Global Leaders, which is a program concerning practical business English. Needless to say, communication in English requires a knowledge of basic vocabulary and grammar, as well as receptive and productive skills. But it is also necessary to have a mindset oriented towards the use of English and an understanding of the subtle nuances that English holds, as well as the practical ability to use the right expression for the given situation. Practical English for Global Leaders covers these elements with a curriculum that focuses on three aspects of English communication: English ability; an English-oriented mindset; and practical ability.

The course spans one year, during which we provide opportunities for students to take the TOEIC test and the TOEIC SW tests. Students are not required to take the tests, but we offer them every other month for those who wish to.

In learning English, one of the most important things is perseverance—to keep at it—so maintaining motivation is vital. For our Practical English for Global Leaders course, we use the TOEIC test and TOEIC SW tests as a way to motivate students and encourage them to take the tests regularly to keep track of their progress.

The reason we chose the TOEIC test among all of the available options was that it is the most widely known and trusted among business people. We also decided to adopt the TOEIC SW tests because they allow us to directly measure speaking and writing skills, and because the tests are under the same brand as the TOEIC test.

Many of the students in our Practical English for Global Leaders course are sent by our corporate clients, and the fact that the TOEIC tests,



Keiko Yamada

Manager
Kenichi Ohmae Graduate School of Business
Business Breakthrough Inc.

which are highly trusted within the corporate community, enables us to clearly indicate each student's improvement in productive skills, resulting from their study efforts, was also a major factor in our decision to choose TOEIC.

In fact, I took the TOEIC SW tests myself as part of the process of choosing the appropriate tests to recommend to my students. The TOEIC Speaking test—with its pace of questions, its emphasis on expressive ability, and its format that requires examinees to think in English before answering in that same language—impressed me as being very practical. Meanwhile, the focus of the TOEIC Writing test on communicating a message—through composition and narrative development, for instance, rather than spelling and grammar—perfectly suited the concept of our course.

The students of Practical English for Global Leaders are diverse, with some wanting to work overseas in the future, while others have a more pressing need to improve their English for their current jobs. Regardless of their specific motivation, I hope that all of the students will use the TOEIC test and TOEIC SW tests as a way to regularly check up on their skills so they can go on to achieve their respective goals.

For more details about the Practical English for Global Leaders course, see the course website. (*Available only in Japanese)

<http://www.ohmae.ac.jp/ex/pe/>

First school in Japan to offer students to take the TOEIC® SW IP tests

Dokkyo University

School-wide emphasis on English instruction helps Dokkyo University maintain its prowess in foreign languages

Ever since its establishment, Dokkyo University's philosophy has been oriented towards foreign languages, and the university has garnered a reputation as one of the leading institutions in this area.

At present, eleven foreign languages are taught at Dokkyo University. Among these, considerable emphasis is placed on English, given its role as the international language. This is reflected in the school-wide administration of the TOEIC test, says Yaeko Nakanishi, who is the director of the university's Research Institute of Foreign Language Teaching and a professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies within the Faculty of International Liberal Arts.

“Any internationally minded person needs to acquire skills in English, given its role as the global language. That is why all of the departments at Dokkyo University administer the TOEIC test.

“The university covers the costs for a total of three tests (for all students enrolled in the common university-wide curriculum—except for English majors). One test is given to students after they enter the university, and then two more are administered in January of both their first and second years. The tests allow students to periodically gauge their English ability, while the university also uses the scores to group students into classes as part of its ongoing effort to maintain small class sizes (at around 25 students) and maximize opportunities for students to improve their English.

“Those students who major in English also take the test in their third year, so they are tested a total of four times.”

The university also uses TOEIC scores in its

teacher training courses for those students aiming to earn qualifications as an English teacher. Students must score at least 700 on the test in order to proceed to the teaching practice part of the course, and the trainees are encouraged to use as much English as possible in the classes they teach.

Surveying needs helped develop a student-friendly environment for the tests

Dokkyo University, on June 11, 2008, held Japan's first TOEIC SW IP tests, with the test administration planned and organized by the university's Research Institute of Foreign Language Teaching. According to Professor Nakanishi, “the aim of the institute is to help advance Dokkyo University's language education, and its activities towards that end can be divided largely into the categories of 'education assistance' and 'research.'

“Education assistance includes efforts like the International Communication Zone (ICZ), where students can come into contact with other languages and cultures after school hours; chat rooms, where students can converse with native speakers of other languages; and a range of foreign-language seminars, including TOEIC test preparation.

“We also use TOEIC scores for research and analyzing score trends over the years to determine English education needs.”

Yoshiko Nakagawa, the Deputy Chief Officer of Planning and Research Section at the institute, who worked diligently to introduce the TOEIC SW IP tests at Dokkyo, explained the decision to add the test as one component of education assistance:

“When Japanese students study overseas, for instance, they score higher on average in English tests than those from other countries, yet often find



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themselves—in real conversational situations—left behind because they are unable to speak out as much as they would like to.

“Internationalization means that today’s students are more likely than ever to need to speak and write English when they join the workforce. I want students to use the TOEIC SW tests as a way to build confidence in their English speaking and writing ability.”

Rieko Kon of the Planning and Research Section at the institute, who was instrumental in the planning and organization of the tests, added: “One of the reasons we decided to implement the tests was that they were part of the TOEIC program. By adding the TOEIC SW tests to our existing university-wide TOEIC test, I felt that we could create a system that would allow us to gain a comprehensive view of students’ abilities in the four language skills.”

The institute began by surveying students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages to ascertain their needs. The results showed that around 80 percent of them were interested in taking the tests, so a formal decision was made to implement the tests, which allowed the institute to appropriate a budget and reserve rooms.

Next, efforts were made to make the tests student-friendly, which included scheduling evening timeslots to ensure they did not conflict with classes, limiting test-room capacity to thirty students, having the university cover some of the costs, placing informational posters around the campus, running advertisement videos on university notice boards and the university website to attract examinees throughout the university, and administering a seminar in tandem with the TOEIC Steering Committee.

Ultimately, around twenty people applied to take the tests. Most of them were English majors,

but there were also some majoring in German, French, and international legal studies, among others. A questionnaire conducted after the tests showed that many of the examinees took the test as a way to gauge their skills (see Reference).

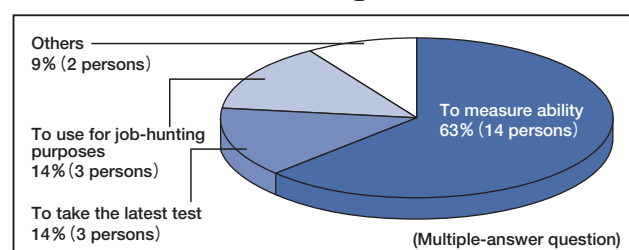
“All I hoped for initially was that we would get five examinees—the minimum required number,” recalls Ms. Kon. “So I was delighted that the response far exceeded that. There was a clear spike in applicant numbers after the seminar, so I believe it helped motivate students by explaining to them the necessity of English skills and broadening their understanding of the test.”

95 percent of students want to take the tests again; university eyes the tests as a learning tool

The responses to the questionnaire show that students found the tests quite difficult overall. One student said that it was harder to speak in English for the speaking test than anticipated, while another felt the pace of the questions was challenging. Still other test takers pointed out that it was hard to keep up or that it was difficult to think of what to write for the writing test.

Still, many students looked favorably on the tests themselves, saying that they wanted to try again and get good scores; and that now they know what the test was like so they intend to make a concerted

[Reference] Reason for taking test





Reiko Kon

Planning and Research
Section
Research Institute of
Foreign Language
Teaching
Dokkyo University



The TOEIC SW tests seminar



Students take the Institutional Program tests

effort to raise their scores next time. Indeed, 95 percent of respondents wanted to take the tests again.

TOEIC SW tests Proficiency Level Descriptors* show that these motivated students averaged five on the speaking test and six on the writing test.

Ms. Nakagawa, reflecting on the outcome of the tests, said: “Because it was our first time, some students got slightly confused about operating the computers, but we got through it fairly smoothly. I hope the students use their test results to identify their weaknesses and put that knowledge to good use in their studies.”

“The results showed that the students have acquired basic speaking and writing skills,” added Ms. Kon. “The important thing now is for us to provide support to the students so as to enable them to apply those basic skills. In the future, we intend to analyze the TOEIC and TOEIC SW test scores and establish a framework that enables us to determine trends with regard to our students’ English abilities so that we can offer advice on how to develop their skills.

“I think that holding the TOEIC SW tests regularly and providing communication-oriented opportunities for students to use English will lead to improvements in students’ ability to successfully communicate in English.”

With some students already inquiring about the next tests, Professor Nakanishi spoke about the university’s plans for tests in the future.

“Our aim at the institute is to satisfy the needs of students and offer them support for their language studies. To that end, we are always eager to introduce any new initiatives that might have positive outcome for students, and administrating the TOEIC SW IP tests was one such effort.

“Now we will consult the test results and the views of the students that took the tests to consider new ways of improving their English studies.”

Dokkyo University has a long history of providing top-quality language education, and expectations are high that the TOEIC SW IP tests will help to uphold and extend that tradition in the future.

※ Proficiency Level Descriptors are based on the test-taker’s scores. There are eight levels for the TOEIC Speaking test and nine for the Writing test.

School overview

Name : Dokkyo University
Founded : 1883 as the German Association.
Student body : Approximately 8,900

The founding spirit of Dokkyo University is “a university is an institution in which character is developed through learning.” With a long history and tradition of foreign language studies and international exchange, Dokkyo University offers students an effective environment for acquiring foreign languages and learning about foreign cultures, including short-term and long-term study abroad programs with seventeen universities in nine countries.

TOEIC® SW tests supplement the elective Speech Course, which focuses on students' abilities for self-expression and explanation

Miyazaki Municipal University

English classes feature small class sizes and an emphasis on linguistic ability as the cornerstone of human understanding

Established in 1993, Miyazaki Municipal University (MMU) is one of Japan's few liberal arts universities, and has only one faculty and department: the Department of Intercultural Studies in the Faculty of Humanities. The three educational goals of the university are to foster English ability and advance practical IT skills; to nurture values shared worldwide; and to instill the ability to put knowledge and skills to effective use. To that end, the university strives to develop a broad perspective and instill a profound sense of humanity among the student body.

Reflecting that aim, Harukazu Nakabeppu, the president of MMU, pointed out that the institution is exerting a considerable effort for the language instruction within its curriculum.

“As the word 'humanities' suggests,” he noted, “education at our university is based on promoting an independent, cultured life and human understanding. The concept of human understanding includes politics, society, culture, and all other facets of human life, but our ability to consider and comprehend these things is rooted in language. In particular, English ability is vital for developing a global-minded perspective.

“That is why MMU has placed an emphasis on language as one component of the education we offer. We invest a great deal of effort for teaching both the students' native language, Japanese, as well as the international language, English.”

The university is underscoring the importance of an ability to properly use Japanese and informing students that any limitation in their Japanese ability will automatically become a limitation for their English ability.

Motofumi Nakayama, dean of the

Department of Intercultural Studies, explains more: “We believe that learning English alone is not enough to acquire the broad perspective, sensitivity, and flexibility needed for a person to make a contribution globally as well as locally. That's why we are making a coordinated effort to improve students' overall Japanese abilities, including skills related to logic, thought, and expression.”

How, then, is English—which is surely the centerpiece of foreign-language education—taught at MMU?

One way is through intensive courses that are offered from an early stage. In their first semester, first-year students take English A, as well as the “computer-aided language learning” courses CALL A and CALL C courses, followed by English B and CALL B in their second semester—all of which are compulsory.

There are three classes per week for both the English A and B courses, with one conducted by a Japanese teacher and the other two by a native speaker of English. This means students take a total of five English classes per week in the first semester, and four in the second.

Professor Nakayama explained the university's English-related efforts: “We feel it is important to strike while the iron is hot. We have students undergo intensive English instruction while they are still in their freshman year, because this is when motivation is at its highest.

“Class sizes are limited to between 25 and 30 students, and class composition is determined in accordance with individual students' level of ability and interest. In addition to those four or five English classes per week, students are required to complete many assignments. As a result, when classes and self-study are taken into account, a considerable portion the first year is dedicated to learning English.”

The fundamentals of English learned in the



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first year are then used as a launch pad for students to go on to intermediate and advanced elective English classes in their second and third years, as well as to prepare them for specialized subjects taught in English.

Speech class over three years fosters the explanatory ability required in the international community

MMU's goals for English education are to develop students' ability to understand what others are saying, to state opinions accurately, to debate and negotiate, and to enter into contracts. The university's English courses are not limited to reading and writing, but focus on listening and speaking as well. Indeed, the university works aggressively to improve those skills. For instance, grammar-centered classes do not neglect to also provide instruction regarding pronunciation and speaking rhythm, and the CALL courses feature teaching materials that assist conversation practice.

In addition, students have the option of taking the Speech I-VI series of elective courses, which are tailored to help improve oral expression over a period of three years.

Courses I through IV are compulsory for those who wish to gain qualification as English teachers, and they incorporate elements of instruction so that students can not only learn how to teach English, but also develop a diverse range of skills. For these reasons, the courses are popular with all sorts of students — not just those who intend to become English teachers.

The first-year classes are Speech I and II, which cover the differences between Japanese and English sounds. Students start with the fundamentals, including the correct pronunciation of the alphabet, in order to develop proper spoken

English over time. In the second year, students take Speech III and IV, where they learn to make short speeches and aim to become able to speak for around two minutes without reading a script. The third-year classes are Speech V and VI, where students strive to develop English debating skills.

Associate Professor Shigeru Takeno, who teaches the Speech courses, explains more their aim:

“The ability to question information presented by others, and to consider things thoroughly, is vital in the international community. It is important to overcome differences in opinion not by force, but by pursuing mutual understanding through debate, thereby identifying the best course to take. Ultimately, language is an important part of peace-building.

“Speech courses I through VI are not just about giving students the opportunity to polish their self-expression skills. They also aim to nurture the ability of students to explain things in a way that makes sense in an international setting, such as instilling in students a mindset that will make it easier for them to interact with foreign cultures.

“For example, one of the aims of the courses is reflected in the group work conducted in Speech III and IV, where students are divided into groups and they give presentations to their groups on pre-assigned topics. Students are required to ask questions of the speaker. Training students to query things gradually heightens their ability to listen to the essence of what people are saying, form questions that will not be misunderstood, and, (from the speaker's perspective) provide explanations that address questions presented to them—no more, no less.”

Compulsory TOEIC SW tests allow objective measurement of skills

Reflecting that robust curriculum, students



Shigeru Takeno
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Faculty of Humanities
Miyazaki Municipal
University

have been required to take the TOEIC SW tests as part of Speech III and IV since the 2007 academic year. We asked Associate Professor Takeno why the test was incorporated as part of those courses.

“Most of the evaluation of students' speech writing and performance naturally comes down to my personal judgment as the teacher, so we needed an objective way to measure their skills. We chose the TOEIC Speaking test because it measures many of the skills we are trying to develop in our Speech courses; such as speed of response, for example.

“Another reason we chose the TOEIC SW tests was that they addressed our need to change the way our students view speech. Many of them hear the word “speech” and think of a spoken recital in front of an audience, whereas in fact our day-to-day conversation and debates are simply a string of speeches.

“People in foreign countries are more used to making speeches than Japanese people, and many of them would have no problem speaking for several minutes on a given topic if asked to express a view on it. My hope is that the TOEIC Speaking test will allow students to learn more about how to explain things, the proper order for conveying information, and the right amount of information to provide.

“But there is also a writing aspect to speech. When writing a speech script, we need to know how to structure the speech to make it convincing, so I hope the TOEIC Writing test, which covers these things, will help our students acquire such skills.”

The university encouraged students to take the TOEIC SW tests in the 2007 academic year, but in the 2008 academic year it went one step further by making it compulsory for students to take the test

at least once a year, with a portion of the test fee covered by the University Alumni Association. As a result, 48 of the approximately 60 students taking the Speech class took advantage of the group application scheme to take the Secure Program before the end of the first semester in July.

The university also covered a part of the cost of the TOEIC SP test. Consequently, the number of students taking TOEIC tests, including the Secure and Institutional Programs, is on the rise.

Associate Professor Takeno told us the following about the results of the TOEIC SW tests:

“I was impressed by the students' positive attitude towards the tests. Many of them told me that they were looking forward to taking them. Their results were better than I had imagined, but a post-exam questionnaire showed that many of them, unfortunately, felt they had been unable to apply the things they had learned in class. We don't offer test preparation in classes, but our classes are oriented towards similar goals as the tests, so I look forward to our students boosting their abilities and applying those skills well in the next round of TOEIC SW tests.”

The university is considering having students of the Speech III and IV courses take the TOEIC SW tests after the second semester in order to evaluate their progress.

Instructors at MMU expressed their hope that students will use their four years at the university to discover their potential so that they can subsequently play a prominent role as local and global leaders; and that the school's unique system of speech classes and small-group seminars will provide the sort of well-rounded education that will stand graduates in good stead in the international community.

School overview

Name : Miyazaki Municipal University
Founded : 1993
Student body : 917 (as of May 1, 2008)

Established by Miyazaki City and six surrounding municipalities (now three due to subsequent town mergers), MMU aims to produce graduates with the sort of well-rounded education needed to make a positive contribution to the international community, based on a broad knowledge of foreign cultures, history, politics, and economics. Features of this liberal arts university include small-group seminars and graduation thesis presentations.

More examples of how the TOEIC SW tests are being put to use are available at the official TOEIC website : <http://www.toEIC.or.jp/sw/case>

*Available only in Japanese

Interview

What is needed to improve speaking and writing skills

Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

In the 2008 academic year, the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (TUFS) set up the English Learning Center and launched its Support Program for Autonomous Learning of English. The program incorporates the TOEIC test, which serves as a yardstick for measuring English ability, while students may also take the TOEIC Speaking and Writing Institutional Program if they wish.

We asked Naoyuki Naganuma and Yoji Kudo, who are both lecturers at the Department of Foreign Studies' English Learning Center, to discuss specific efforts being made by the Support Program for Autonomous Learning of English to improve students' speaking and writing abilities, and how the TOEIC SW tests are being used.

Broad English-related experience to foster communicative ability

— Overview of the English Learning Center.

Mr. Naganuma: The center was set up in the 2008 academic year as part of the university's English Optimization Project. Its objective is to administer the Support Program for Autonomous Learning of English as part of the university's English curriculum and, to that end, we provide a comprehensive range of support for autonomous learning, including the English Corner, which is a forum for students to actually speak English; the Writing Center, which uses a computer-based writing training system to improve students' writing skills; e-Learning Programs, which help with reading and listening, as well as building vocabulary; and the English Library, which aims to promote the learning of English through extensive reading and listening.

The support program also features the TOEIC test as a way to measure English skills. Students take the test upon admission to the

university, and upon completion of their first and second years. We offer several courses in line with students' levels of ability. The students are divided into three groups using TOEIC scores of 550, 785, and 860 as the targets, which were set after consulting the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

— What kind of speaking and writing training do students get under the Support Program for Autonomous Learning of English?

Mr. Kudo: Take English Corner for example. We hold what we call “speaking sessions,” where which students talk a given topic. There are no more than five students per instructor, and those instructors are native speakers of English.

Say a student makes a grammatical error: the instructor, instead of taking time out to explain the finer points of grammar, would (wherever possible) focus on keeping the conversation going. Still, to ensure that the exercise does not simply end with the satisfaction of having participated in a conversation, students are required to write reports after reflecting on the session in order to reinforce the points learned.

Mr. Naganuma: It is my hope that students use these sessions to learn how to develop a conversation. To achieve that, we have made up a number of model conversations for each topic, with a little added variations, so that we can teach students how to advance a conversation and have them experience what it's like to use the English words they've learned. With that in mind, we place an emphasis on the use of natural expressions and do not limit the vocabulary that students may use, so as to encourage students to reach an understanding of a topic within the given context, rather than being spoon-fed definitions.



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— Why do you focus on ensuring a variety of expressions and vocabulary?

Mr. Kudo: In real-life situations, where they actually have to use English, students are often exposed to things that go beyond the bounds of regular teaching materials—that is, a conversation may start to derail, there might be differences of opinion, or the story in a book could take an unexpected turn.

Similarly, when writing or conversing in English, the important thing is not just the message, but how the information is communicated so as to keep the other people interested. Students must be able to do this regardless of the genre or topic because these skills are directly linked to true communicative ability.

That's why we don't limit ourselves to traditional teaching materials, and also seek innovation, thereby helping our students acquire a greater variety of English.

Mr. Naganuma: The extent of your vocabulary and expressive skills is the key to your ability to write good quality English or make a witty contribution to a conversation.

Having students read extensively and exposing them to a range of experiences in English—starting at a basic level and gradually becoming more challenging—is an effective means of developing a feel for the language. Therefore, our program has a wide selection of reading materials so that students can read English at a level of difficulty suited to their abilities. This allows them to pick up new words, methods of developing a narrative, and a rich array of expressions, from various authors.

Narrative is important even when writing a report, a thesis, or some such document that aims to convince another person; and learning expressions that leave an impression on the reader are a sure way

to improve writing quality. That's why we believe reading stories is an effective learning method.

TOEIC SW tests motivate learners by highlighting skills that need to be developed

— Not only does TUFU hold the TOEIC SW IP tests, but both of you have taken them. What were your impressions of the tests?

Mr. Naganuma: When conducting speaking sessions and writing sessions, I wanted to provide our students with a way to measure their speaking and writing skills, and that's why we made the decision to introduce the TOEIC SW IP tests.

The tests provide a generous variety of question formats—even for lower-level skills—so not only are they good for allowing students to recognize the skills needed in the real world, but they also serve as a means of boosting the motivation to learn.

Mr. Kudo: Take writing exercises for example. People usually assume this means translating passages of Japanese into English or writing paragraphs with an emphasis on formal niceties, but a big part of writing is constructing a proper sentence even for a simple short sentence as well as the ability to stay on topic while developing the narrative. I think the TOEIC Writing test is good because it is wide-ranging, covering everything from simple sentences to essays, with questions that feature a variety of settings, levels, and formats. As a result, students can better understand the necessity of those skills.

Similarly, speaking skills include the ability to develop a topic. So, in that sense, as well, I think that taking the TOEIC SW tests can raise students' awareness of the need to develop the abilities to construct expressions that deal with all sorts of topics.

Mr. Naganuma: Also, because the TOEIC SW tests limit answer times, not only do they require students to construct proper English, they also make them aware of time-management skills and the need to sort out what to say and communicate that message within a reasonable time-frame.

The Support Program for Autonomous Learning of English is still in its infancy, but I fully expect that our students will use the program to their advantage and take a positive approach to the TOEIC SW tests as well.

Tests help to promote autonomous learning and make ideal training materials

— Given your research on test theory, so do you think are the best ways of using independent tests like TOEIC?

Mr. Kudo: When it comes to tests, there is a tendency to prepare (and offer preparation) based on the type of questions that appear, but that's not the real purpose of a test. Improved test results should be a result of working hard to improve your skills, rather than just preparing for the test itself. It is my hope that teachers come to understand this point and teach things that will boost their students' skills in areas that will be examined in tests instead of teaching test-taking skills.

After all, it is vital that student understand why they are learning something if there is to be any improvement in their ability.

Mr. Naganuma: On a related note, I think students lack the ability to learn independently these days, perhaps because of the highly supervised method of teaching at junior and senior high schools. In order to raise their learning autonomy, it

is important to make students aware of goals that their studying is leading to.

I think that the same applies to independent tests like TOEIC. That is, students should become fully aware of why they take those tests and the skills that they measure before they go about their studies. In this way, we can foster the ability of students to study on their own.

In that context, test questions can be effective as learning materials, and I would like to see test questions used not simply as something that has to be answered, but as a helpful learning tool that can assist study and training.

Tests, by their very nature, gauge skills. Certainly, there are limits to what they can gauge; but it is important that we maximize the potential of independent tests and create an organic link between them and classes. To achieve that, tests must not be considered as some extracurricular element, but rather as one aspect of classes. And we must have a clear idea of where they fit into our scheme of instruction.

School overview

Name : Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
Founded : 1897 as the School of Foreign Languages
attached to the High School of Commerce
Student body : 3,769 (as of May 1, 2008)

TUFS is one of Japan's oldest national universities. It aims to provide students with a well-rounded education and wide-ranging perspective; to encourage flexible thinking and an open-hearted sensibility; and to produce graduates who are able to utilize a high level of applied linguistic ability to work in tandem with people from diverse cultural backgrounds to address local issues. The university offers 26 majors and has student exchange arrangements with 65 universities in 33 countries and territories.

Announcing the renewed TOEIC official Japanese website

We have relaunched the English version of our website. The renewed website contains further information about TOEIC programs. Please visit the web page below. TOEIC Newsletter back issues are also available.

http://www.toEIC.or.jp/toEIC_en/



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