

A Practical Approach to Teaching L2 Grammar

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The communicative activity being introduced here has been designed for Japanese L2 intermediate level learners¹ in mind. The emphasis is on the most frequently encountered grammatical problems that students face. The activity centers on a specific grammar point, which is clearly explained using examples and is included in the Teacher's notes. The idea proposed is not new, but it is unique and will present grammar in a fun and interesting way. As stated by Ma Carmen Perez-Llantada (2007), if the goal of an instructor is to get students to use grammatical structures in a meaningful and constructive way, then we as teachers need to provide students with sufficient opportunities to use the grammatical structures in intriguing, thought provoking activities.

One of the most common mistakes teachers encounter with beginner level university students is with their inability to use the simple past tense correctly. This lesson addresses that issue and it also gets students to use WH-question words correctly. It is called *Yumeijin (Famous person)*. It is best to provide and use information gap activities whenever possible because it brings students together to accomplish a specific task. In this activity, students are presented with information about the lives of two famous Japanese celebrities and in pairs they will work together to determine the missing information. The missing information will elicit responses using the simple past tense and the use of WH-question words. A more detailed description of this activity is listed in the Teacher's Notes.

The grammar activity is flexible and can be used in classes of all sizes. In the Teacher's Notes, there is an indication of how much time should be spent on this activity. However, it should be up to the teacher to determine how thoroughly they want to exploit it. The exercise can be used as a warm-up in the beginning of a lesson or at the end as revision. It can also be used as the main focus of a lesson if the instructor so desires. Enclosed in the Teacher's Notes is a detailed description of what needs to be prepared before the class begins. There are suggestions on how to introduce the activity and encouragement to teachers on how to revise the grammar activities and manipulate them in a way they see fit.

With this exercise, collaborative learning is encouraged. There is a real advantage of working in pairs or groups because interaction among students gives everyone a chance to speak in a non-threatening environment. When working in pairs or groups, students can learn from each other in a natural way and are allowed to be free from the constraints of the classroom. In essence, peer interaction in activities that optimize opportunities for L2 practice, meaning, negotiation, and feedback exchange, are conducive to L2 learning.

To properly utilize this activity, the role of the instructor is to facilitate communication by spending time with each group in the class. If things are going well, students should be encouraged to move on. If things are not going well, the instructor should offer assistance and

¹ English as a second language for Japanese intermediate learners.

encouragement. It is wise to keep notes of the common mistakes that occur over and over again so that they can be addressed.

The activity offers an optimal environment for teaching grammar implicitly, but in order to make a lesson complete it is necessary to have feedback sessions and follow-up tasks conducted at the end of each class. It is also necessary to have some sort of evaluation process done in order to ascertain whether the students actually understand the grammar being presented. How to successfully implement corrective feedback sessions, follow-ups, and rubric for evaluating learner awareness is a topic for further discussion.

The purpose of this learner awareness activity is to introduce a grammar focus in a fun and interesting way for L2 learners. The topic is global and of interest particularly to Japanese college level students and it is organized in such a way that allows the students to feel as if they are not actually participating in a grammar activity. According to McLaughlin, Rossman and McLeod (1983), repeated practice with exercises that emphasize practical use of grammatical structures, can lead to the development of automatic routines that formulate into an innate (like?) understanding of the grammatical rules. With a heavy emphasis on interaction and implicit instruction laid out in this activity, this goal can be achieved.

References

- McLaughlin, B., Rossman, T., & McLeod, B. (1983). Second Language Learning: An information-processing perspective. *Language Learning*. 33.
- Ma Carmen Perez-Llantada. (2007). New Trends In Grammar Teaching: Issues and applications. *Atlantis*. 158.

About the Author

Originally from San Diego, Gregg Romano moved to Tokyo Japan in 1998 and lived there until 2005. He taught English at various universities throughout the Tokyo Metropolitan area during that time. Since 2005, he has been residing in Honolulu Hawaii and has been teaching ESOL courses at Kapiolani Community College. He is continually searching for new ways to increase learner performance through implicit target language instruction via the utilization of current global topics and issues. The sharing of ideas and discussions about topics related to ESL is a passion of his.

Teacher's Notes for *Yumeijin*

Focus: The purpose of this activity is to get students using the simple past tense correctly. For example: *he went/ he saw/ he was etc.* This activity also gets learners to use WH-question words in the past tense. For example: *What did he..? When did he..? Why did he..?*

Level: Elementary/ Pre-intermediate level students.

Time: 20-25 minutes with students getting into pairs

Activity: Information gap.

Notes: Give handouts to the students and divide the class into pairs (A and B). Give the students a few minutes to read through the passages. Make it clear that they all have 12 spaces to fill in, but that these spaces are not the same for both pairs. Explain that they will have 10 minutes to work together and fill in the spaces. They must accomplish this by asking questions and taking note of the necessary information. Stop promptly after 10 minutes and have the students work together and check their work. Go around the class and ask each student at least one piece of information that they remember. Get them to do that without referring to their handout. As an extra activity, Students can work together in pairs to describe the background of another famous person that they like.

Answer Keys:

Student A (Sho Sakurai) 1) January 2) 25th 3) 1982 4) Johnny 5) associates 6) 1995 7) 13 8) Arashi 9) 1999 10) newscaster 11) 2006 12) News Zero (13) entrance (14) exam (15) Keio (16) University (17) angry (18) Urusai (19) yo (shut up) (20) quiet

Student B (Jun Matsumoto) (1) Toshima (2) Kinky (3) Kids (4) Johnny (5) Associates (6) 1996 (7) graduation (8) day (9) Arashi (10) September (11) 15th (12) 1999 (13) Honolulu (14) Hawaii (15) 2nd (16) grade (17) van (18) hurt (19) sorry (20) fault

Yumeijin

(Student A)

Work with a partner. Ask and answer questions to find the missing information in the following short stories about Sho Sakurai and Jun Matsumoto of the band Arashi. For example:

When was Jun born?

What was Sho like as a child?

Use **Wh** question words – What, Where, When, Why, How, etc.

Sho Sakurai was born on (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____. He began his career in the entertainment industry when he joined the talent agency (4) _____ and (5) _____ in (6) _____. At the age of (7) _____. About seven years after his debut as a singer with (8) _____ in (9) _____, he became a (10) _____ in (11) _____, appearing in the news program (12) _____.

A funny story about Sho was when he went to take the (13) _____ (14) _____ at (15) _____ (16) _____. There were so many fans screaming at him and it made him (17) _____. He turned around and told them (18) _____ (19) _____. After that they all became very (20) _____.

(Student B)

Work with a partner. Ask and answer questions to find the missing information in the following short stories about Sho Sakurai and Jun Matsumoto of the band Arashi. For example:

When was Jun born?

What was Sho like as a child?

Use **Wh** question words – What, Where, When, Why, How, etc.

Jun Matsumoto was born in (1) _____, Tokyo, as the youngest child in his family. He has an older sister who really liked the (2) _____ (3) _____. That made Jun want to join the agency (4) _____ and (5) _____ in (6) _____. He sent his application to the agency on his elementary school (7) _____ (8) _____. He was quickly chosen and soon began his music career with the group (9) _____. He was one of the five members in the group that was formed on (10) _____ (11) _____, (12) _____, in (13) _____, (14) _____.

A funny story about Jun was when he was in (15) _____ (16) _____. One time he ran out into the street and was knocked over by a (17) _____ and he was really (18) _____. He was always such a cheerful boy, so when the ambulance came, he just kept saying (19) _____ to the man who helped him. He kept saying it was his (20) _____ for running out into the street.