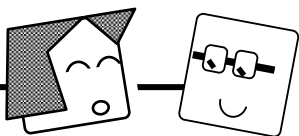


Conversations in Class

Information, feedback and discussion on the *Immediate Method* and “CiC”

アルマ言語教育研究会ニュースレター



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We are interested in your comments, critics, ideas, questions, drawings, surveys, etc. We are also at your service to answer any questions.

Research Group for Teaching Conversation in Japan

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Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the *Conversations in Class* newsletter. In it, you will find information on our textbook *Conversations in Class* and the research and ideas behind it. We hope you will find it stimulating and informative. Since Alma Publishers was established in 1999, its activities have been as much in applied research as in publishing. The classroom management technique which became known as the *Immediate Method* has been our inspiration from the start. All of us at Alma are professional teachers, and after the success we had with developing the ideas into a practical method, we wanted to exchange ideas with fellow teachers and researchers. Accordingly, we have given training workshops in many contexts and on various scales, the most prominent event being the annual IM Autumn Workshop. The sixth IM Workshop took place in October this year at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. Teachers and researchers who take part in our workshops are usually happy they have done so, and many learn something new or useful. Some of them start using our textbooks, others don't. That's fine with us. We aim to be more than just a publishing company.

On a more general level, we hope that we can help define the concept of conversation teaching. These two simple words put together have a great many resonances, ranging from 'chat' style teaching (often keeping housewives engaged during a one-hour lesson) for some people, to *general oral English teaching* for many others. But we believe there is more to it than both of these ideas. To teach conversation is to teach a dynamic skill, i.e. that of participating in an open-ended interaction in real time. I didn't realize this until I was first introduced to the *Immediate Method* a few years ago. I had been teaching

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What is the *Immediate Method* ?

– The fundamentals –

The *Immediate Method* (IM) is a class management system which aims to get all students to actively participate in conversations during classtime. It incorporates a number of techniques used by many veteran teachers. Its originality lies in the fact that it was formalized into a coherent system that has one clear goal (practicing conversation) and that it makes use of a few practical devices such as the **Grammar Toolbox** and the **Progress Sheet**.

1. Content

Most lessons revolve around **everyday life topics** (“How do you come to school?”, “Who's your favorite actor?”, etc.). The method tries to avoid speech acts, because more often than not these require role playing. There is a place for role playing in class, but the IM prioritizes the exchange of real information. Structures and vocabulary that can be used immediately to speak about oneself, and to ask about one's partner's daily life are introduced, built upon, modified and practiced until they can be used with ease.

2. Meta-communication skills

Meta-communication expressions allow students to deal successfully with major conversation-blocking situations such as (1) they have not understood something the teacher said, (2) they have forgotten a word they want to use to say something, or (3) they want to say something but don't have the linguistic ability to do so.

Many textbooks start with lists of 'classroom English', and this is a good first step, but experience has shown that if basic expressions such as “I don't know” or “How do you say ~ ?” are not practiced regularly, students have a hard time using them. This is a question of cultural habits, which are deep, and largely unconscious.

3. Regular conversation tests

Each class-time is roughly divided in two periods. First, new material is presented,

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Editorial

→ Continued from page 1

→ oral communication all right, and my students were able to say things in the target language. But it was not until I started having conversation tests with pairs of students in class that I realized I had never taught *conversation* before. Real time, negotiable interaction became the focus of my classes. Having my students respond naturally and promptly was a huge leap forward in my teaching, and opened up a number of exciting pathways. What came next for me was an exploration of the cultural codes connected with conversation. Getting students to ask and answer to questions quickly is one thing (and a very nice thing when it happens for the first time after years of teaching your own language !). Getting them to have a conversation that flows *naturally* is another, because for most of us *naturally* actually means *in a culturally appropriate way*. Helping students to respond naturally (with information that is both real and culturally appropriate) and having them take responsibility for not only their end of the conversation, but also their end of the teacher-learner partnership is a huge part of the IM, and as such we made it a focus of *Conversations in Class*.

In this issue you will find some tips on classroom management, a piece on cultural codes of conversation, a review of the 6th IM Autumn Workshop, some user feedback on *CiC*, and a short summary of the *Immediate Method*. We welcome comments, positive or otherwise, and would be delighted if you let us know what you think of our endeavours. ■

Stephen Richmond

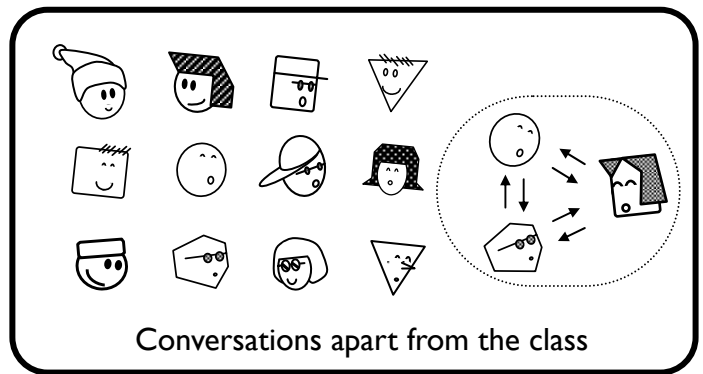
What is the *Immediate Method*?

→ Continued from page 1

→ discussed and practiced with the whole class as a group. After this, the teacher has a series of 2 to 5 minutes conversations with students on a one-to-one or one-to-two basis. During conversation time, other students practice by themselves or in pairs. The students actually having a conversation thus do not feel observed and judged by the group. Most students come to enjoy this one-to-one time with the teacher, and prepare thoroughly for it.

- The teacher organizes a series of conversations, which include the teacher and one, two or three students. They last between 1 and 5 min.
- Students receive a mark for their performance.
- When possible, the conversation test is done away from the class-group, for example in a corner of the classroom.
- During the conversation tests, the other students do oral

practice in pairs, continue studying the lesson and do written exercises.



The conversation test gives meaning and focus to each class. A significant part of each class-time is devoted to it, so that each student gets tested as often as possible, even when the group is large.

4. Result: A rewarding, enjoyable and fair class management system

Despite the connotations of dread associated with 'tests', it is easy for students to succeed. If they have mastered the very reasonable amount of information that makes up each lesson, and are willing to communicate, they will get a good mark. There are no surprises, no tricky questions, and no 'wrong answers'. All they are asked is that they communicate, and many students do this and more.

At the end of the test, they receive a mark on their **Progress Sheet**, providing both instant feedback and precise information of where they are in terms of getting their term credit for the class.

FAQ

Isn't it hard to ask students to do a test so often?

Students face their teacher and have to perform. They are always a bit nervous at the beginning, but feel great, even sometimes exhilarated, after completing the simple task that was assigned to them: conducting a conversation, however simple, in a foreign language. In itself, the conversation test is an essential piece of oral practice.

Does the test have an effect on the class dynamic?

The fact that the test is conducted apart from the group is very important. The main pressure on students, which makes many become mute, comes from their peers. Students who wouldn't have uttered a word in class sometimes reveal themselves to be good students. Most students are surprised to see just how fun it can be to chat with the teacher in English, and how easy it is to do well. "Bad boys" who would have disturbed the class with a negative attitude cannot do so when they are facing the teacher privately. Some of these students become the best and most cooperative students after a few successful conversations. After everyone has taken one test, the group is no longer a block that can use its power of inertia to disrupt the class. The class dynamic has fundamentally changed.

CLASSROOM TIPS

The Attendance Sheet (also known as the Progress Sheet)

But students are not used to managing their own learning...

This is usually true. But it is also true that if they are shown the right way from the beginning of the year and given a clear and fair class system, they quickly take responsibility for their efforts. Bringing the Progress sheet (without which they do not get attendance marks, since no rolls are taken) is a small effort on the part of the student, but makes a big difference to their overall attitude to the class.

It must be tiring for the teacher...

Teachers have to concentrate during class time and manage time carefully (considering they test half of their class each week, during class). But at the same time,

- there is very little correction time. It is not normal to base the evaluation of students in a conversation class on written assignments and tests. We give oral tests to our students (the test is actually a privileged time of practice), and when the testing is finished (during class-time), the marks are already on paper, ready to be added-up at the end of the term. The teacher spends energy during the class, and very little energy outside the class.
- We believe that the most tiring thing for a teacher is the *frustration* of spending her energy without succeeding in getting a majority of her students to speak in class. When your students speak and make progress, the whole atmosphere changes and teaching conversation becomes enjoyable.

Can the IM be used with any textbook?

Yes, it can. Some teachers can't choose which textbook they have to use in class. They do make use of the class management system (in-class testing, attendance sheet, etc.). But those who can decide their textbook usually choose Alma textbooks, because they have been developed by the people who formalized the IM into a coherent approach. Alma textbooks have two main characteristics that make them different from other textbooks:

- Their content is exclusively made of elements that can be used immediately in a meaningful conversation. With most textbooks, conversation teachers have to skim what can be used and what had better be left out.
- They present the basic sentence structures in a simple and visual way, using special charts ("Grammar Toolbox"; see www.almalang.com for a sample unit). These help the teacher to convey target material quickly and efficiently. More time can then be spent on oral practice, including conversation tests. ■



How does it work ?

- the teacher photocopies blank Attendance sheets and hands them to students in the first class of the semester. She explains that the Sheet is an official record of both their **attendance** and **performance** in every class, and without the sheet they won't get any marks for either. They are warned that if they lose it, all the information on it will be lost because the teacher is not keeping any other record (other than in her failing memory).
- Students fill in their personal information in the top part of the Sheet, and the dates of all the classes of that semester. They also stick a photo of themselves in the space provided (or the teacher can do this if they have the facilities). This makes the Sheet more official, and far less misplaceable.
- Every week, the teacher gives a stamp in the *Attendance* column (during pair practice).
- After each test, the teacher writes a mark in the *Conversation* column, and sometimes a comment in the *Comment* column on an aspect of the students performance that was particularly good, or areas in which they should work harder. Students get instant feedback on their performance, and they can see their progress and areas where they can improve.
- At the end of the semester, the teacher collects Attendance Sheets from all students, and simply adds up the marks and presence stamps for grading.

What are the benefits ?

- The teacher doesn't have to call a roll (five minutes gained in each class : more time to talk!).
- The Progress Sheet quickly feels like a personal, official document akin to a passport, with the ID picture, official looking stamps, and... official records of presence and tests marks. The psychological effect is surprising : students quickly take responsibility for their attendance and test performances.
- This is about the only efficient way to keep records when the teacher chooses to use the *Immediate Method* in class, which requires having to conduct, mark and record a large number of tests in a very short amount of time.
- Adding up the marks at the end of the semester is quick and easy.

What happens if a student forgets or loses her Sheet ?

- If the Sheet is forgotten, just ask the student to write her name and the date on a piece of paper. At the next class, she will present her Sheet and the piece of paper, and

the teacher will stamp the Sheet and destroy the piece of paper. Teachers can choose to penalise (e.g. one point off their next test) repeat offenders if they so choose.

- If the Sheet is lost, the teacher can usually trust the student. Or choose to be strict : for example, the student can be trusted for presence, but asked to do again the lost tests. In all cases, don't treat this incident as insignificant, always tell the student, 'Well, that's a problem. Look for it, I'm sure it will turn up'. You don't want the word to be spread that losing your Progress Sheet is OK.
- Actually, only about one student in 100 or 200 loses his Sheet every year. To keep that percentage as close to zero as possible, just ask students to stick an envelope on the inside back cover of their textbook, and always keep their Sheet in it, except during classtime.

Here is an example of an Attendance Sheet (or Progress Sheet) :

Progress Sheet			
	in Japanese	in English	
Class day/time	月曜日 2限目	Monday, 2 nd period	
Family name	田中	Tanaka	
First name	大輔	Daisuke	
Student Number	016xx45	016xx45	
Faculty, Department	社会学部	sociology	
Year	1年生	1st year	
この紙は毎回の授業と試験に必ず持って来て下さい。 Please bring this sheet to every class この紙を絶対になくさないでください。 Do not lose this sheet			Comments
Date	Attendance (one absence = ... points)	Conversation	Comments
1 October 2 nd	✳		
2 October 9 th	✳	8 / 10 <input type="checkbox"/>	Relax !
3 October 16 th	✳		
4 October 23 rd	✳	7 / 10 <input type="checkbox"/>	Very more your questions
5 October 30 th	✳		
6 November 6 th	✳	8.5 / 10 <input type="checkbox"/>	
7 November 13 th	- 3pt		
8 November 20 th	✳		
9 November 27 th	✳	<input type="checkbox"/> 7.5 / 10	Work an intention
10 December 4 th	✳		
11 December 11 th		8.5 + / 10 <input type="checkbox"/>	
12 December 18 th	✳		
13 January 8 th	✳	32 / 40 <input type="checkbox"/>	Well done !
14			
15			
TOTAL : 7 / 10		72 / 90	TOTAL : 79 / 100
80			

presence requirement will be enforced, thereby keeping this aspect of class-management under control. When the teacher is going around the class giving presence stamps, he can warn students : *Everybody else is coming every week. You have been absent twice already. One more time and you are out* . This may seem somewhat heartless, but this way you don't get students coming to you during the last class, begging that you make an exception just for them and forcing you to be harsh late in the term, or give up what you had insisted upon at the beginning.

Another inspiration from the IM and its regular in-class testing is that this teacher found a way to introduce some degree of interactivity in what would otherwise be a passive lecture. He works in a multimedia classroom and uses the university electronic bulletin board. The bulletin board is designed to send messages to students regarding the class, but students can actually answer. This teacher uses the electronic bulletin board to ask students questions regarding the class content (*What do you think would happen in this situation ?* , etc.), and have them answer during class-time. Since the class is conducted in English, students write in English. When they have posted their answer, other students can read it (and even sometimes comment on it). Instead of speaking for the whole 90 minutes (which has proven to be a highly ineffective way of teaching), the teacher speaks for 30 minutes, then send a question. Students spend 30 minutes answering the question by writing, and reading other students' answers. The last 30 minutes of class are spent commenting on students' answers, or giving additional information on the topic of the day. During the central 30 minutes, the teacher is free to go around the classroom, give attendance stamps and talk privately with students, answer their questions, comment on their answers, etc. ■

You can find an Attendance Sheet on our web site at www.almalang.com. Use the PDF version to print out, or the Word version to modify it as you need.

Can I use the Attendance Sheet even if I don't use the IM ?

Of course. One member of the Alma Publisher team teaches an intercultural communication class, which is a lecture type of class. There are more than 60 students in attendance, and using a traditional way of checking attendance would be difficult and time-consuming. Also, many students are 3rd and 4th grade students, who have to go on job-hunting activities. Being lax with presence would result in huge groups on certain weeks, and half of that on other weeks. The Presence sheet is an efficient way of reminding students that the

More classroom tips on
www.almalang.com:

- ◆ **Time management** : how much time do I need in order to test all my students at least once every second week during class ? How much time can I devote to one pair of students ?
- ◆ **Varying the conversation test** : how can I prevent the test from becoming repetitive, and raise the bar with gradually more demanding tests ? When I am tired, or the class is unsettled, is there a form of test that will require less energy from me and more focus and effort from the students?

The 2006 *Immediate Method* Autumn Workshop — Rikkyo University, Tokyo

The Autumn Workshop is a one-day seminar organised by the *Research Group for Teaching Conversation in Japan*. It allows participants to be trained in the *Immediate Method*, and to exchange stories about their teaching experiences with colleagues. The sixth annual *Immediate Method* Autumn Workshop took place on October 15th this year at Rikkyo University in Tokyo, and was the first time the event had been held in the Kanto region.



The morning was taken up by short seminars and step-by-step training in the method as a whole:

- Culturally-based codes of conversation and how they influence speaking classes
- Introduction to the IM (immersion class learning French)
- a Q&A session about class management.

In the afternoon, practitioners of the *Immediate Method* gave short presentations about their classroom experience:

- The positive effects of “meta-communication”
- Participants split into two groups: the IM for low-intermediate students (university level) and the IM for beginner students (JHS), and further explored how the method works in their own teaching situation.



Most people who took part seemed satisfied with the workshop (see excerpts from the feedback form). On the down side, a slight mix-up with the schedule in the afternoon was noted, and a few participants wished there had been a final session in which teachers of different languages could exchange and discuss ideas (there were in fact three concurrent sessions, one in English, one in French and one in Japanese). But the “What could be improved?” section was left blank on many forms, leading us to conclude that the general level of satisfaction was high.



One disappointment was that we had “only” 36 participants on that Sunday. Last year, the fifth IM Autumn Workshop, held at Kyoto University, managed to draw together 92 teachers of English, French, and Japanese. This year’s comparatively low turnout may be connected with a lack of efficiency of our promotion. If anybody has ideas which may help us promote our next workshop or any other events, please let us know! We are also willing to give presentations at local chapters of teachers groups such as JALT or ETJ. We have done workshops at JALT Kobe and ETJ Kobe. Don’t hesitate to contact us if you would like to find out more. ■

From the feedback forms :

- ◆ “How to teach and motivate the students was explained very well.”
- ◆ “Tim’s thorough, detailed, well-documented research confirms a lot of points my co-workers and I encounter, and then some more I hadn’t explored. Scott’s discussion was inspiring and he addressed the bad press Japanese teachers and students get – low expectations, etc. Thanks for blowing that apart !”.
- ◆ “Friendly atmosphere, good presentations, practitioners as well as researchers were presenting, good location. Thank you very much !”
- ◆ “My friend and I enjoyed your workshop very much. It seems like a good and easy teaching method. I will apply this technique in my teaching. Especially the Attendance sheet idea, that was amazing! We hope your next workshop will be somewhere in Chiba. Once again thank you very much!!”

Feedback on CiC

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An e-mail exchange between Nick Walters and Bruno Vannieu

Bruno Vannieu: You have been using *Conversations in Class* since October. What are your first impressions?

Nick Walters : To answer your question, generally, the overall premise and format of the student's textbook is good. The patterns are certainly usable and are simple enough for the students to get straight into practicing them (also, much of the content will be familiar, if only as passive knowledge, from secondary school classes).

There are a couple of things I'm less sure about. Firstly, the book seems to encourage static conversation practice. By that I mean, there are few suggestions in either the student's or the teacher's book, as far as I have seen, for activities which would lead to more creative practice. Obviously, depending on your viewpoint, that either allows or requires you to use ideas from elsewhere or of your own. Nevertheless, I think that including some activity suggestions would be useful (perhaps some relating to big classes and others for smaller classes).

Secondly, I think including more suggestions for extension or follow up questions would be useful in helping students to see how conversations develop. The model conversations are fine, but they tend to suggest a "this is the pattern you must follow" mentality, whereas a list of relevant questions to select from might lead to more supported creativity on their part (perhaps designed in a similar way to the vocabulary boxes that are included in the lessons).

I hope these comments are useful. I've actually only done about 4 classes based on the book, so I wouldn't want to make any very strong judgment on it just yet and certainly at present the students themselves seem involved in doing the work.

Bruno Vannieu : Thank you very much. We very much appreciate feedback (and would be very happy to hear from other teachers who are using CiC).

I will comment first on your second point. You are referring to the danger of students sticking to the one sentence pattern that is outlined in each "Grammar Toolbox". This is a real concern, connected to both CiC's strength and potential weakness. The basic premise of CiC is that we want students to become comfortable with using standard patterns of increasing difficulty, before asking them to widen the way they speak. Our idea is that intermediate Japanese students (and more specifically low-intermediate, which is the real level of most university students) benefit from thorough practice before moving into wider possibilities. They usually have some grammatical knowledge, but they have almost never used it in the context of real-time communication. We found that if we skip that step, they are too hesitant and their real-time verbal communication is impaired. This basic option is quite different from the model found in many textbooks. Lots of textbooks do have useful vocabulary and interesting topics, but they also require students to do that first step by themselves, which more often than not doesn't happen.

Now, the way conversations develop (beyond a succession of standardized questions and answers) has also been a central concern for us. With the *Immediate Method*, we do countless conversation tests, and we have indeed noticed that the way students talk has a tendency to be rigid and static. There are certain cultural factors which we have identified that

contribute to this. In the foreword of CiC, there are six pages (with explanations in both English and Japanese) dealing with what we call the "Golden rules" of verbal communication in English, which are cultural ones. "Silence and culture" deals with the basic problem of students being mute when asked a question, and offers practical metacommunication strategies they can use. The other two rules deal with length of answers (a factor of variety in itself) and "Vary your speech". There, students are asked to use alternatively (1) closed questions, (2) open questions, and (3) statements about themselves. In an English conversation, it is quite often the case that interlocutors don't even ask questions. They simply speak about themselves and the interlocutor will respond to them by speaking about herself in turn. This variation is so central in producing native-sounding conversations that we have included a "Vary your speech" section below every Toolbox. Once the basic structure is absorbed (this shouldn't take more than five minutes for the teacher to present it and maybe ten minutes for students to practice it in pairs), students should go on to other ways of using the same basic patterns. This should actually become one of the criteria to mark the conversation test. During the first few tests, the teachers (and students!) will be happy enough to have a two-way conversation that goes on in real-time without hesitations. But from perhaps the third test on, the teacher can and should raise the bar and require students to express themselves in more complex and varied ways. Once they have the confidence of being able to take part in a real conversation, most students are capable of playing with the language and varying their speech as much as possible. The effect on their fluency is quite incredible.

As a third step, students can get extra material in the "One Step Further" sections. Those sections are designed so that students go and find what they can use, by contrast with the Grammar Toolbox / Vocabulary boxes in which all the material is broken down into easily digestible chunks. The *One Step Further* sections have two levels of complexity. The first type, found on the third page of every 'A lesson', presents a few question/answer pairs, with a few substitutable phrases/words. The students have to work that little bit harder in order to personalize the material, but because they are familiar with doing that in the Grammar Toolboxes, it's not much of a problem for most students, and in fact a good challenge to fill in spare class time. The second type of *One Step Further* section is found on the third page of 'B lessons' and consists of two or three sample questions (or statements) with two or three appropriate responses to each. Nothing is broken down for the student, and so they have to analyze it themselves and see how they can use the grammar or phrases in their own speech. For super-advanced classes you can announce that one of the questions from *One Step Further* will be somewhere in the conversation test, and they will prepare by themselves responses based on the examples.

In summary, we stand squarely with our basic principle of first giving very simple structures to students and asking them to practise until they become really comfortable using them in a real-time verbal exchange. But indeed they must capitalize on that first step by varying their speech (sentence patterns, ways to participate in a conversation, additional questions). We have done our best to include extra sections to that effect. Maybe you will get used to them as the semester progresses. CiC is written in a way that is different from most textbooks, and we understand that it may take some time to adjust to the format. But we are sure that your students will appreciate having distinct steps up which to progress.

Now, about activities : there are suggestions for activities in the Teacher's Book under the heading "Warm-up". Those are

mainly brainstorming activities (vocabulary and ideas build-up) and in-class polling (students go around class and inquire about their classmates' habits, coming up with simple statistics). But it's true that there is room for other activities, coming from the teacher's experience. On a general level, the conversation test is the main activity if the teacher decides to use the "Immediate Method" in class. Oral testing (individually or in pairs) takes a significant amount of class time, so that the time left after discounting test time, presentation of the basic linguistic material, and pair practice, is consistent with the warm-up activities offered in the teachers' book.

Nick Walters: Thanks for the reply and the attachment which helped to clarify things a lot. I should perhaps also point out that I use the book with non-English majors, which inevitably means that they are more reliant on guidance than some English majors would be.

Bruno Vannieu : Just wondering : Do you actually conduct regular oral tests in your class?

Nick Walters: Yes, I have once used in-class testing. I'm still not sure how best to approach testing as I worry that at any one point only two students are getting some attention. Nevertheless, I can see the usefulness of the approach.

(continued on www.almalang.com) ■

Conversations in Class audio tracks



- ✓ All 96 of the audio tracks can be downloaded by students onto their MP3 players by accessing our podcast site at www.alma-download.com.

We have noticed that students nowadays rarely use CDs, preferring their sleek MP3 players (i-Pods, etc.). We hope that offering audio in this format will make it easier for them to use the audio tracks that are part of the textbook.

- ✓ Teachers get a CD with the Teacher's Book, to use in class and to freely copy for their students whenever necessary.

NEW AUDIO TRACKS

The first version of the CD was not satisfactory in terms of sound quality. We have re-recorded everything, with a variety of accents :

1. native accents from America, England, Australia and New Zealand, and
2. Japanese accents, playing the roles of the Japanese students featured in the dialogues. Although it presented some technical difficulties for the recording, we made a point of including different levels of accents, so that students can get different role models.
 - Rumi's accent is near-native. She represents the ideal student.
 - Kana's accent is upper-intermediate level. She represents a reachable target for most students.
 - Takeshi's accent is low-intermediate level. He clearly sounds Japanese, and so many students will be able to identify with him. The important point is that although his accent is not perfect, he can be understood. Our students are often discouraged when they aim for perfection, instead of making sure they can get their point across.

SPECIAL OFFER

Free Teacher's Book (normal value : 2100 yen, tax included) for teachers who choose *Conversations in Class* for use in their class from April 2007. Just send us the attached fax form, or the same information by e-mail.



Please note that the occasional fax doesn't get through – we had one request for a sample in November that was completely unreadable, and we are unable to reach that teacher! If you don't hear from us after sending a fax, please contact us again. This is a rare occurrence, but for us being in contact with teachers is of the utmost importance, and we are sometimes powerless in the face of technical glitches.

Culture and Conversation

Conversational styles are deeply rooted in culture. It is now widely accepted that pragmatic competence is as important as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in determining how good a student sounds when taking part in a conversation in English.

*Our aim is not to impose Western cultural styles on Japanese students, but to give them basic advice that will help both the class and their conversations proceed smoothly, and help students develop their pragmatic competence. Basic cultural advice goes a long way **when it is incorporated into frequent oral practice.***

We have included in the foreword of CiC some 'Golden Rules' for more native-like English conversation. The following is the English explanation of 'Golden Rule 2 : Length of answers'.

GOLDEN RULE 2: Give long and rich answers

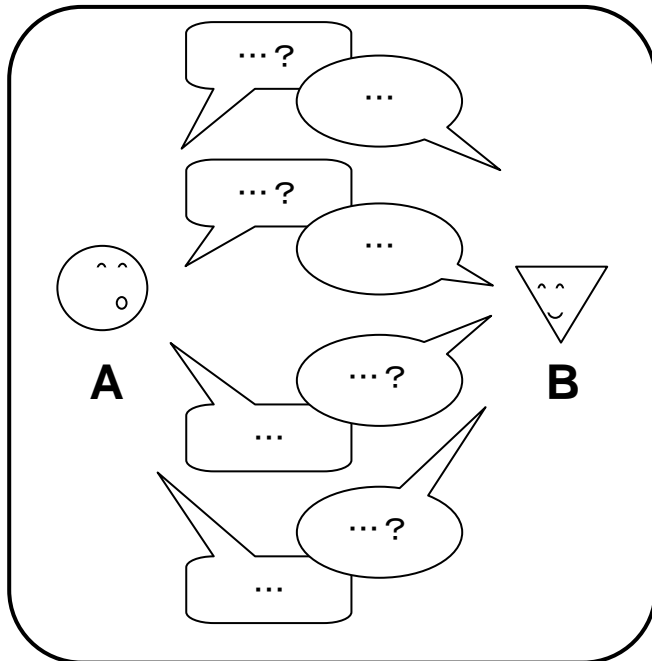
Conversation styles in Japanese are often quite different to those of English. In Japanese, the person responding to

questions usually answers exactly what has been asked and nothing more. He then waits for the next question. Depending on context, it may appear impolite to add extra bits of information when responding to a question.

Because of this, answers are usually very short. For example “Do you work? – Yes”. The person who answered “yes” leaves the questioner all latitude to choose the next question, such as “What type of work do you do?”, “How many days a week do you work?”, “Do you like your job?”, etc.

This general pattern applies especially to situations in which (1) people don’t know each other well, (2) they are not of equal rank, (3) there is a group present. In those cases, a conversation in Japanese is usually made up of a quick succession of questions and short answers. **The classroom context** (usually involving the above conditions) **tends to induce Japanese people into giving short answers**. This tendency is reinforced in language classes, since many Japanese students are afraid of making mistakes when they speak and so are inclined to give the shortest possible answer.

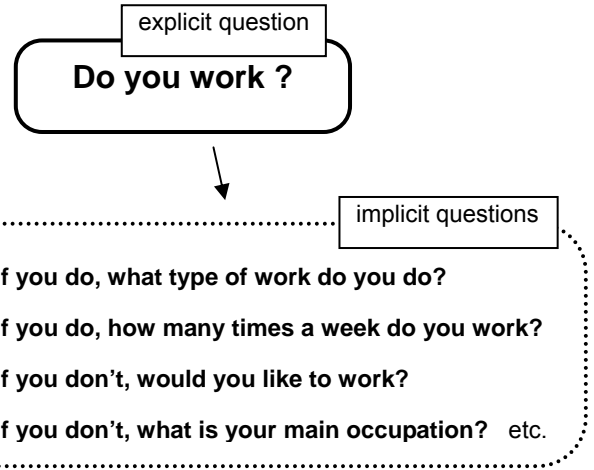
A common conversation structure in Japanese



A first asks a series of questions (one at a time). B answers, usually with brief answers. B then asks a series of questions to A.

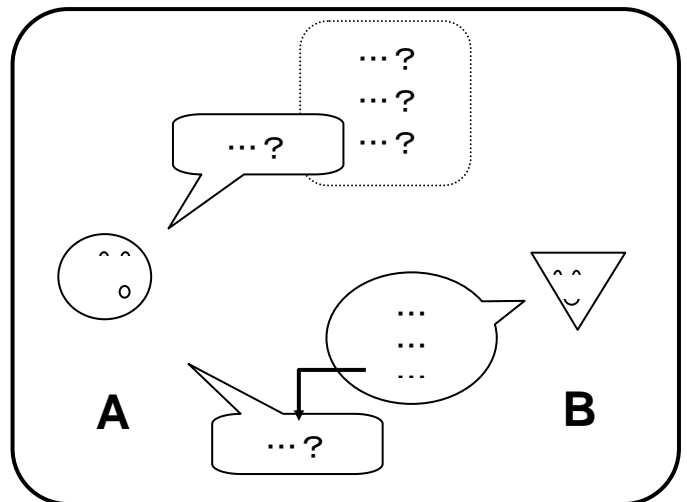
However, in English, if you give a very short answer to a question such as “Do you work?” **you may sound as if you are unwilling to communicate**. This is because the general pattern of conversation is different in English. When someone asks a question such as “Do you work?”, they of course want to know the direct answer to this question (“yes” or “no”), but the question is also an invitation to communicate more information, using that topic as a pretext. We can therefore consider that any question implicitly contains several other questions.

e.g.



In order to sound cooperative when taking part in an English conversation, you should answer not only the basic question (with for example “yes” or “no”), but also one of the implicit questions contained in the main question. For example, in response to *Do you work?*, you might answer “Yes, I am an architect”, “No, I am a housewife”, “Yes, I work twice a week in a convenience store”, “No, but I’d like to start working soon”, etc.

A common conversation structure in English



A first asks a question. This question contains several implicit questions.

B answers at least one of these implicit questions, on top of giving the answer to the basic question. There is more information in the answer than has been requested explicitly.

A then uses a part of the long answer to ask a new question, or speak about himself or herself on the same or a related topic.

If you give longer answers like these, your interlocutor will feel you are contributing positively to the conversation. Also, they will find it easier to continue talking, because your richer answer will give them ideas about possible extensions on this topic. ■

You can download the three “Golden Rules of conversations” in **English and Japanese** from our website:

- ◆ **Golden Rule 1:** Silence and culture
- ◆ **Golden Rule 2:** Length of answers
- ◆ **Golden Rule 3:** Vary your speech